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Fifty-third Session

Official Records

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New York

President: Mr. Opertti ..... (Uruguay)

In the absence of the President, Mr. Mungra (Suriname), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3.15 p.m.

Address by Mr. James Michel, Vice-President of the Seychelles

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the Vice-President of the Seychelles.

Mr. James Michel, Vice-President of the Seychelles, was escorted to the rostrum.

The Acting President: I have great pleasure in welcoming the Vice-President of the Seychelles, Mr. James Michel, and inviting him to address the General Assembly.

Mr. Michel (Seychelles): Seychelles is pleased to see Mr. Opertti at the helm of this session of the General Assembly. We welcome the experience, expertise and skills which he brings to our deliberations. Likewise, we wish to express our appreciation to his predecessor for his outstanding contribution and leadership during the fifty-second session.

Our felicitations also go to the Secretary-General for spearheading courageous and innovative reforms aimed at revitalizing the United Nations at the threshold of the new millennium.

We support the measures being undertaken to make the United Nations more efficient and effective, capable of making optimal use of its resources. My delegation believes that development ought to be central to the renewed United Nations agenda. For this reason, we hold that a larger proportion of United Nations resources should be allocated to development, particularly to meet the growing and imperious needs of the developing countries. It is only in so doing that the objective of attaining a "dividend for development" can be attained.

Reform of the United Nations cannot be complete without the reform of its main organ responsible for peace and security: the Security Council. We are all agreed on this, but we differ on how to go about it. Yet there is no doubt that the Security Council should be transformed into a democratic and representative organ, reflecting both its universal character and present-day realities, and taking into consideration the need for balanced representation in its membership.

Many options have been mooted. But there are still major obstacles to overcome if we are to agree on the composition of the enlarged Council, the creation of new permanent seats and the question of the veto right for both current and prospective members. We need to move and harmonize positions in order to arrive at a generally acceptable solution. And in so doing we must reckon with the fact that the developing countries of Africa, Asia and Latin America are and will be major stakeholders in the formulation of the international power structure of the twenty-first century.

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Equally important for my delegation is that the reform package should encompass the enhancement of the General Assembly as the supreme policy-making organ of the United Nations. It is only through the reinforcement of the Assembly's role and mandate that we can successfully tackle some of the most pressing issues facing humanity, not least the process of globalization. Globalization has brought prosperity to some. However, in this new global village, many of its inhabitants — especially those in its slums — face the prospect of further impoverishment and marginalization. For them, the spectre of poverty, hunger, malnutrition, inadequate shelter and disease is a constant reality. It is their daily lot. It flouts human dignity. No one should have to live and die in poverty. This is not how we envisage the destiny of the greater part of humankind in the twenty-first century.

So the greatest challenge facing us, the United Nations, is the eradication of the slums of our global village. If we want to get rid of the scourge of poverty, we need to redress the present imbalances. We need to ensure that all countries of the world benefit from the effects of globalization.

Our basic contention — and I do not think that it is too much to ask for — is that we should be able to increase our share in the global economy, be it through trade or through the mobilization of foreign direct investment. As small developing economies, we face the enormous challenge of building our export and institutional capacities to allow us to assume our place in this fiercely competitive global environment.

If we are to attract investments, improve product quality, meet standards — in short, compete effectively and grasp the opportunities presented by the World Trade Organization (WTO) agreements — then it is imperative that the international community recognize the need to grant us adequate transitional support.

It is in this context that my delegation appeals to the European Union to accept the African, Caribbean and Pacific group of States' request for an extension of trade preferences under a WTO waiver for a protracted period of time, within the framework of the successor agreement to the Lomé IV Convention. Genuine cooperation should take cognizance of the special development need of weaker and vulnerable partners to adjust to the demands of competitiveness. We need time to allow a transitional period of preparation and adjustment. And we need to do so under fair conditions.

We small island developing States are the weaker and more vulnerable members of the international community. It is a well-established fact. But whilst momentum has been created for the recognition of our special characteristics and constraints, it is somewhat disappointing to note that avowed intentions have yet to be translated into action. How are we to interpret this apparent inertia in the application of the so-called vulnerability index? How are we to interpret this apparent indifference to the problems we face, especially in relation to security, sustainable development and environmental protection?

Vulnerability has taught us in the Seychelles a few lessons, though. Whilst our voice is little heard in this forum, whenever we are asked about our role on the world stage our response generally reveals an impressive scoresheet in such areas as conservation of the environment and an equally ambitious vision of our place in the world. We continue to work very hard to ensure that the development necessary to give our people a high degree of social well-being does not affect the "last sanctuary on Earth", as we call ourselves.

"Environment" for us is not a fashion statement. We do not intend to give any lessons, but we certainly intend to be the conscience of the world. Whilst others, infinitely more powerful and developed than we are, pollute and spoil, we preserve and protect. We have set aside some 45 per cent of our national territory for the protection of nature. And we have offered to the international community two of its most precious natural treasures as World Heritage Sites.

But all this has a cost. We bear the brunt of it, conscious of our responsibility to future generations, conscious that planet Earth is our common heritage. Ours, though, is a shared responsibility, requiring global solutions to a global problem. And the solution is to be found not in rhetoric, but in action. Therefore, we expect the industrialized nations to pay less lip service to environmental protection. We expect them to be accountable and to meet their Kyoto commitments. Above all, we expect them to get their act together and clean up the mess we are all in.

Vulnerability has also taught us to live in racial harmony, to make ours the ideals for which the United Nations stands for. The force of our social cohesion lies in our racial diversity. Africans, Asians and Europeans have forged our nation, resulting in a happy marriage of races that has led to an eclectic population of 79,000

people living in harmony and tolerance. When we see what goes on around us — wars, acts of wanton terrorism and destruction, savagery and barbarism — all in the name of some insane ideology, religious, racial or political, we fail to comprehend. We fail to understand, perhaps because we have learned to live together as one nation, regardless of racial origin or political or religious conviction.

We try very hard to mitigate the effects of our vulnerability. If we have achieved some degree of success, it is through the prudent and often painstaking management of our natural resources. It is also through the judicious use of international aid and grants that we have received over the years. We have not wasted a cent of what has been awarded to us. We have managed overseas development assistance by creating a beneficial multiplier effect that has trickled down into all spheres and levels of our national development. Unfortunately, the logic and unwritten laws of international cooperation will have it that we have become victims of this very prudent use of aid. We seem to have worked ourselves off the list of nations that qualify for such help.

In this interdependent world of ours, the ramifications of globalization have proved that the world order has no frontiers. Solutions to the challenges of the new international order are to be sought through international solidarity and cooperation, through the vehicle of multilateralism. This presupposes that every member of the international community should enjoy peace and security. Unfortunately, too many conflict situations persist, negating economic growth and social progress. The African continent has been disproportionately afflicted by intra-State and inter-State conflicts.

At the special meeting of the Security Council on Africa in April this year, we urged the international community to put its full weight behind African peace initiatives, but also to reinforce the institutional and operational capacity of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in the prevention, management and resolution of conflicts in Africa. Finding durable solutions to our problems in Africa requires a concerted and integrated approach by the international community if we want to make the African renaissance a reality in an era of global solidarity and partnership.

Speaking of peace and security, we cannot but empathize with a fellow small island State — Cyprus — with which we are sentimentally bound in a common destiny. The division of the island has persisted for too long. We cannot allow it to continue as a fait accompli. Nor can we condone the presence of foreign troops there. Cyprus is a unitary, sovereign State whose intercommunal problems can only be resolved on the basis of Security Council resolutions.

In a separate but related context, we note with regret the continuing tension in Greek-Turkish relations. My country, like all peace-loving nations, would like to see Greece and Turkey establish good-neighbourly relations based on international law and treaties, as well as on the basis of the principles enshrined in the United Nations Charter. Differences are bound to remain, but these can be resolved within mechanisms available in international law, in particular, through the jurisdiction of the International Court of Justice. We urge Turkey to accept the Court's jurisdiction.

We are conscious of the inequalities and double standards which prevail throughout the world. The rules of the game, more often than not, are not tipped in favour of the smallest among us. Indeed, relations between nations give the lie to the statement that we are all equal. This is the reality of things. We do not say that we necessarily accept the status quo. But we have learned to live with it. Neither do we accept that squalor, injustice and poverty should be the norms guiding relations between human beings in the next millennium.

So, in recognizing our own shortcomings and failures, we also recognize that humankind is presented with a unique opportunity to right the wrongs and injustices that it has perpetrated.

We are also presented with a unique opportunity to make our planet, our only home, a better, cleaner and safer place to live. We can do so through a proactive United Nations. It is not a perfect institution. But it is the only institution which represents the collective conscience of humanity. It represents the unique, indispensable forum for shared international responsibilities and global issues which affect the entire community of nations.

The United Nations remains our greatest hope for justice, peace, security and development. It remains our only hope for a more compassionate world.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I thank the Vice-President of the Seychelles for the statement he has just made.

Mr. James Michel, Vice-President of the Seychelles, was escorted from the rostrum.

The Acting President: The next speaker is His Excellency the Honourable Jakaya Mrisho Kikwete, Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of the United Republic of Tanzania, whom I invite to address the Assembly.

Mr. Kikwete (United Republic of Tanzania): On behalf of the delegation of the United Republic of Tanzania, and on my own behalf, allow me to extend to Mr. Didier Opertti our sincere congratulations on his unanimous election as President of the General Assembly at its fifty-third session. To his predecessor, Mr. Hennadiy Udovenko, I should like to convey our deep appreciation for the exemplary manner in which he presided over the last session.

My delegation also wishes to take this opportunity to commend the Secretary-General for the dedication he has demonstrated in guiding our Organization through one of its most challenging periods, as we seek to reform and revitalize it and to restore its focus on the economic, social and development agenda — the very heart of its mission.

The reform of the United Nations is a course we have set for ourselves. Indeed, the reform we desire cannot be an end in itself; rather, it is a means to better enable our Organization to carry out its mission efficiently and more effectively. Therefore, our efforts must be directed not only at placing the development problems we face on the global agenda, but also at strengthening the concrete contribution of the United Nations in the development field and resisting any attempts at withdrawal in this area. For it is in the area of development that the challenge to the United Nations is most critical, and it is for this reason that we believe the Organization should continue to be involved, and its role be strengthened.

My delegation strongly shares the general desire of Member States to strengthen the role of the Security Council, as well as to review its composition. We also share disappointment about the degree of progress we have been able to achieve so far. However, progress on this matter can only be made after we reach agreement on the fundamental principles involved and how we can move together in the direction of implementing that agreement.

Tanzania, and indeed Africa, has made its position clear: that we desire an expanded, representative and democratized Security Council in which each Member is given a rightful role to play. Africa, as the largest group, demands and deserves no fewer than two permanent seats in an appropriately expanded Council. At the moment, we must place the emphasis on reaching agreement on the principle and extent of expanding the Council, and not elsewhere.

An effective United Nations is a matter of as much great concern to my country as it is to all Member States. The effectiveness of our Organization depends, to a considerable extent, on its being financially stable. It is sad that the financial situation of our Organization has become increasingly precarious. Cash balances continue to be dangerously low, the timing and amount of inflows continue to be unpredictable, and the Organization is unable to meet its commitments on time. In other words, a bad financial situation has persisted and become increasingly rigid. We are all aware of the fact that this difficult financial situation has been brought about and is being exacerbated by the non-payment of outstanding assessed contributions on the part of some Member States, especially the major contributor, for reasons of political expediency. We urge them to pay on time, in full and without qualification.

On 7 August this year, the American embassy in my country was the target of a terrorist bombing deliberately planned and callously executed to cause maximum damage. The attack in Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania, claimed the lives of 10 innocent and unsuspecting Tanzanians, injured over 70 people and caused extensive damage to property. A similar and almost simultaneous bombing of the American embassy in Nairobi, Kenya, brought about far greater loss of life and destruction of property.

In the wake of the attack, many friends here sent us messages of condolence and solidarity. Some of them extended financial and material support to help us meet the requirements of treating the victims of the bombing, as well as to help with the investigations. I would like to reiterate the gratitude of the people and Government of Tanzania to all those Governments, organizations and individuals who have expressed solidarity with us or extended material support following that tragic terrorist bombing. Of particular mention here are the people and Government of the United States of America, who extended medical support and assisted in the investigations through the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI).

Terrorism is a heinous crime against humanity. It is cruel, indiscriminate and, above all, wanton and senseless. Whatever cause may have prompted the perpetrators to resort to it, we do not believe that it is any way justifiable. It is the most rational way neither of

expressing one's indignation, nor of dealing with one's so-called enemy. Instead, from the moral and political standpoint, acts of terrorism lead to the alienation of the perpetrators, incite hatred and so, deservedly, earn them outrage and condemnation. Invariably, terrorism reduces the number of sympathizers and adds to the list of opponents. It is a worthless recourse — indeed, a misadventure which common sense demands to be abandoned now.

The bombings brought home a number of realities, namely, that terrorism is a global problem and that no country is safe from its menace. It also reminded us that, just as terrorism has a global reach, so must the fight against it be concerted and global. The world must therefore make it quite clear to the perpetrators of these heinous crimes that terrorism will be answered with swift and decisive action to bring those responsible to justice and that they will find no solace or refuge anywhere.

Thanks to international cooperation and partnership, the investigations into those terrorist bombings are on course and arrests have been made. In fact, two people have already appeared in court in Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania, charged with committing acts of terrorism and murder, thanks to cooperation between Tanzanian investigators, the FBI and several other countries and organizations. We need to strengthen that cooperation in order to bring all of those responsible to justice and ensure that terrorism is comprehensively dealt with. In this regard, we should strengthen international legal regimes against terrorism.

Three months ago in June, world leaders met here in New York and addressed the world drug problem, another international criminal question which deserves global action. The objective was to commit themselves to fighting the demand for illicit drugs, the manufacture of psychotropic substances and the diversion of precursors within precise time-frames. The Political Declaration and the Declaration on the Guiding Principles of Drug Demand Reduction that world leaders adopted at the end of the special session were the first agreements ever aimed exclusively at examining individual and collective problems arising from drug abuse. Just like terrorism, drugs are an international menace which must be dealt with through global cooperation and partnership.

On 12 December this year, we shall be celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, which was adopted by the General Assembly on 10 December 1948. The celebration of the fiftieth anniversary is a fitting occasion for all of us to look critically at our record in the protection and promotion of human rights. This is the time for us to ask ourselves whether our adherence to human rights agreements has made any difference to the way we observe human rights. This is the time for us to renew our commitment to all international instruments to which we are party by implementing the provisions of those agreements.

I wish I could preface my remarks on the Great Lakes region on a more positive note than I did last year. The situation in Burundi remains precarious, notwithstanding the holding of the negotiating process within the framework of the Arusha peace talks. We continue to receive refugees from Burundi, as the security situation inside the country has not improved appreciably. Yet, we are encouraged that the parties to the conflict continue to demonstrate the disposition to a pacific settlement and persist in dialogue. In a couple of weeks, a further round of negotiations will convene in Arusha, under the facilitation of Mwalimu Julius K. Nyerere, to thrash out the details of a settlement and strengthen the undertakings already entered into during the last round of talks.

We will continue to urge the parties to the conflict in Burundi along the path of dialogue in the full knowledge that Tanzania and, indeed, the region can only help. The onus of delivering peace and sustaining it rests squarely and solely on the people that country.

The situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo is very worrisome indeed. The conflict there, in both its internal and external contexts, threatens to throw that country and the region into prolonged anarchy and war unless it is arrested now. The region, particularly within the framework of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the Organization of African Unity (OAU), has expended efforts aimed at securing a ceasefire in order to initiate a political process to bring the conflict to a peaceful end. This was the spirit of the Victoria Falls and Pretoria summits, as well as of the SADC summit in Mauritius only a couple of weeks ago. We are also appreciative of the efforts deployed by Secretary-General Kofi Annan during the Non-Aligned summit in Durban, South Africa, in the search for a speedy end to the hostilities and the beginning of a process of dialogue and negotiation.

My Government believes that anarchy and war in the Democratic Republic of the Congo are not inevitable. They can be avoided provided all the parties demonstrate

a sense of realism and a willingness to work on a comprehensive settlement based on scrupulous respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of that country; the principle of a peaceful settlement of the conflict; full respect for the rights of all the citizens of that country; and the consideration of the legitimate security concerns of the neighbouring countries.

My country will therefore continue, within this framework and in the context of the mandate given to it by the SADC summit meeting which took place in Mauritius recently, to urge all the parties involved to bring an immediate end to the hostilities and to facilitate the commencement of negotiations aimed at securing an understanding on the ceasefire and its monitoring, troop withdrawals and the internal dialogue, which is so critical to the long-term security, peace, stability and unity of that country. I urge the international community to support the regional efforts now under way to avert catastrophe in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

My delegation is equally concerned about the Eritrea-Ethiopia border conflict, which has brought these two sister republics and fraternal peoples into a war which has already claimed many lives and huge damage to property. We continue to urge the two countries to exercise restraint and consider initiatives, particularly those of the OAU, aimed at diffusing tension and finding a peaceful solution to the border conflict.

These two countries, which have endured decades of conflict, know the destruction and pain which war can engender, and they owe it to themselves and to peace in Africa to ensure that nothing is done to aggravate the situation and reignite military confrontation. We also urge them to give mediation a chance. After all, it is in dialogue that both sides of the argument can be heard, and it is in dialogue that mechanisms for enduring peace can be negotiated and put in place.

The instability in the Great Lakes area continues to be the source of refugees in the region. Tanzania has hosted thousands of them, and it seems we will continue to do so because of the deterioration of the political situation in some countries. The exercise to repatriate refugees from the Democratic Republic of the Congo began in October last year and was proceeding well. By June this year, 48,658 Congolese refugees had been repatriated. There were 47,857 remaining, but the repatriation programme was going well.

However, with the outbreak of civil strife in the Congo, the exercise has stalled and new refugees are once again streaming into Tanzania. In the two months of the new conflict in that country, we have already received about 10,000 new refugees. As part of the international community and a responsible member of the United Nations, Tanzania will continue to meet its international obligation of hosting these refugees, and about 200,000 refugees more from Burundi. But we must confess that because of various circumstances, our perseverance is wearing out and our hospitality should not be considered open-ended.

While appealing for increased support and assistance for our country for hosting refugees, we call upon the international community to exert great efforts to deal with the root cause of the refugee problem. Many times before in this Assembly and other forums, the international community has spoken of and committed itself to helping the refugee-producing countries address the root cause of the displacements. I regret that this has remained an unfulfilled intention. I always wonder why there has been so much talk about it and little is being achieved.

Today, we see latent reluctance to engage those countries in sustained political dialogue requiring them to take responsibility for their refugee-generating policies. We see greater preparedness to rationalize their actions in the name of humanitarianism. At times the host country has been the object of undue pressure to make more concessions or even of unjustified blame and accusations. It is very frustrating indeed. This is not the way to assist refugee-producing countries to come to terms with their internal problems and spare others the unending burden of hosting refugees. We need to emphasize the closure of those factories which produce refugees, as we do meeting the needs of those innocent refugees who are the products.

It is in this light that I ask the Assembly and the international community to encourage the countries of the Great Lakes to resolve the underlying political conflicts of the region and to call for mechanisms for greater burden-sharing in a way that will ease strain on the resources of the countries which have borne the brunt of hosting refugees.

The peace process in Angola is, to our utmost regret, moving dangerously towards collapse. While the Lusaka Protocol may still be salvaged, we strongly condemn UNITA for its blatant violations of both the agreement and relevant Security Council resolutions. The

people of Angola need and deserve the peace they have been waiting for for so long. The international community must hold UNITA and its leadership responsible for their failure to fully implement their obligations under the Peace Accords, thus frustrating the successful outcome of the peace process. Tanzania will support any efforts by this Assembly which will ensure that peace obtains in Angola.

The search for a peaceful settlement in Somalia has not borne fruit yet. The country remains divided into sectors, each held by a warlord. We support the efforts of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), within the terms of the Sodore agreement, as well as those of the OAU Chairman and Secretary-General, in searching for a solution in Somalia. We support the efforts to hold a consultative meeting to bring together various groups of people, including individuals, businessmen and community groups, in order to get views and proposals in addition to those of political parties.

Another long-standing issue is the question of Western Sahara. We hope that the referendum will go ahead as planned on 7 December of this year. Tanzania calls on the United Nations to ensure that the preparations are well executed so that justice will prevail, especially in deciding who should vote in the referendum.

We regret that the situation in the Middle East continues to be characterized by tension and continued denial to the Palestinian people of their right to full self-determination and to a homeland of their own, due to the refusal by Israel to honour its obligations towards the peace process. The Israeli policy of territorial expansion, in utter violation of the letter and spirit of those commitments, stands to undermine the prospects for the permanent status negotiations leading to agreement for peace in the area. We call upon the Israeli Government to abandon its obstructionist policies and to resume dialogue. In this regard, my Government is encouraged by the high-level consultations which are currently taking place between the leaders of Palestine and Israel. We hope they will lead to overcoming the present impasse in the peace process.

My delegation has welcomed the recent breakthrough in the long-standing conflict between the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya on the one hand, and the United States and the United Kingdom on the other, over the Lockerbie incident, which culminated in the adoption of Security Council resolution 1192 (1998). It remains our fervent hope that agreement will be reached soon on the trial arrangements so that the sanctions imposed upon Libya can be quickly lifted.

The Korean Peninsula remains an area of tension and unpredictability. We continue to believe that durable peace and eventual unification can be attained only through dialogue. We therefore urge the parties and the international community to support this course.

We welcome the agreement reached between the Governments of Portugal and Indonesia to address the question of East Timor. We urge the two Governments to expand the dialogue they have initiated so that the wishes of the East Timorese people can be fulfilled.

Africa is faced by a number of devastating conflicts. It accepts the primary responsibility for bringing them to an end and for elaborating mechanisms for enduring peace in the continent. It is in fulfilment of that responsibility that the OAU has taken a leading role in searching for solutions. This the organization has done in partnership with its subregional groups of countries and organizations, as was the case with Liberia, Sierra Leone and now in Burundi, Somalia, the Comoros and Lesotho, among others. My Government continues to believe in the centrality of the OAU in the search for solutions to African problems. At the same time, we also believe that where necessary, the OAU and the African continent deserve the support of the international community and of the United Nations in particular.

In this regard, once again wish to pay tribute to the Security Council for the initiative it took a year ago in having a regular ministerial debate on Africa, the result of which was the report of the Secretary-General on the causes of conflict and the promotion of durable peace and sustainable development in Africa. We applauded the Secretary-General for that report and we do so again today. We could not agree more with his observation that

> "it is the persistence of poverty that is impeding the full promise of peace for all of Africa's peoples. The alleviation of poverty must be the first aim of our efforts. Only then — only when prosperity and opportunity become real — will every citizen, young or old, man or woman, have a genuine and lasting stake in a peaceful future for Africa — politically, economically and socially."

Indeed, our illustrious Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, has underscored two important facts here. One, that a poor man, a hungry man, has no peace. Two, only when prosperity and opportunity become real will Africa take its rightful place in the global economy. Africans, more than anyone else, recognize that they bear the

responsibility to move towards that noble objective. They need the support of the international community.

The President took the Chair.

The International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, which my country is privileged to host, has been working under challenging circumstances. During the past 12 months it has made commendable progress. Regrettably, more attention has been attracted by the difficulties it has had to confront than what it has achieved. My Government remains strongly committed to supporting the Tribunal. We are also keenly aware that, just as we have to play our part, the international community must also lend its firm support to the Tribunal to enable it to discharge its mandate and assist, as quickly as it should, in the healing process in Rwanda. The recent judgements by the Tribunal constitute a milestone towards that end. They are a landmark we should welcome and build on.

The adoption in Rome of the Statute for the International Criminal Court is a welcome step towards bridging a critical gap in both international criminal law and international humanitarian and human rights law. My delegation believes that the establishment of the Court will be a concrete assurance of our profound concern about respect for and protection of the humanity we all share. It represents an important assurance that individuals, whether as leaders or otherwise, will be accountable and therefore that impunity will not go unpunished. Indeed, the establishment of the Court will be a legacy of our commitment to the pursuit of justice, and could well go down as one of the most momentous decisions of the twentieth century.

It is in the context of the pursuit of justice that we must, however, mention what in our view is the most serious failure of the Rome Conference. At a time when some financial institutions are making, albeit belatedly, some form of reparation to the victims of the Nazi Holocaust, it is to be regretted that the attribution of some form of criminal responsibility to legal persons is a notion conspicuously absent from the Statute. To the extent that this was driven by considerations of corporate interest, it speaks about our lack of real commitment to justice, notwithstanding any measure of concern and grief we may pretend to extend to victims.

Disarmament continues to be an important issue for my country. The Treaty of Pelindaba establishing a nuclear-weapon-free zone in Africa is testament to the resolve of Africa to pursue the cause of nuclear disarmament. While it is easy to take exception to the recent events in South Asia, we are keenly aware that international responses remain the sole alternative in determining a preferable course of action. We remain convinced that the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) is a valuable international instrument for nuclear disarmament. In the end, the only viable alternative for international peace continues to be a commitment by all States to a total and comprehensive nuclear disarmament.

The Assembly is meeting against the background of a deteriorating international economic situation brought about by the persistence of old problems and the emergence of new ones. The situation has been compounded by the challenges of adjusting to a rapidly liberalizing and globalizing world economy.

The majority of humankind resides in developing countries, and Africa is the least developed of the continents. It is in this regard that my delegation is concerned that after a three-year period of positive economic growth, Africa's economic performance slackened last year, thus demonstrating once again the fragility of the recovery process in our region. A combination of factors, including unpredictable weather conditions, lack of financial resources and poor infrastructure and technology, continue to adversely affect production performances and therefore pose a major constraint on efforts towards recovery, growth and sustainable development.

Trade plays a crucial role in the economic development of any country. Despite the slowdown in production by African countries, the volume of their exports has increased over time. In 1997, for example, Africa's volume of trade increased by 8 per cent, thereby raising the continent's total revenue from trade by 5.9 per cent. However, it is sad to point out that despite all its efforts, Africa's contribution to world trade remains very small and is actually decreasing. Limited access to markets, high tariffs, low commodity prices and low output deny African countries the benefits of the twin process of globalization and trade liberalization. This is unjust, because many of these countries are painfully undertaking major reforms aimed at diversifying their economies. There is therefore an urgent need to address this problem if African countries are to be assisted to increase their participation in global trade. Failure to do so would mean that Africa will continue to be marginalized and will stand to benefit little from the recent years' economic growth and global integration.

Tanzania calls for the establishment of an equitable, secure, non-discriminatory and predictable multilateral trading system that would enhance the trade development possibilities of African countries, and especially of the least developed among us.

The question of sustainable development of African countries also continues to be seriously affected by the heavy debt burden these countries endure. Tanzania is among such affected countries, and is currently spending almost one third of its revenue to pay its external debt, which has now reached a disproportionate rate. My country is currently implementing various debt management programmes to reduce the effects of the debt on Government operations. Despite the resource constraint, my Government has set as a top priority the repayment of its foreign debt, while continuing to negotiate with our creditors on the possibility of rescheduling and/or cancelling some of its debt.

Tanzania believes that the establishment by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund of the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative is a step in the right direction in this endeavour. However, as we have had occasion to state in the past, we are concerned about the conditionalities associated with this initiative. A way out has to be found to ensure that the criteria are made more objective so that as many least developed countries as possible benefit from this otherwise important initiative. What could be a more objective criterion for eligibility under the Initiative than poverty itself? In the same manner, we support the call for the holding of an international conference on money and finance.

On the eve of the new millennium, Tanzania notes with regret that poverty levels remain very high, despite the observance of the International Year for the Eradication of Poverty two years ago. This is unacceptable, and it is not sustainable in the long run.

While those who have more can decide to turn a blind eye or ignore our calls to look for a solution to this human tragedy, it cannot be overemphasized that poverty is the root cause of many problems that cut across the boundaries between rich and poor. The interconnectedness of the world leaves no country insulated from the problems of others. Indeed, even if not in the same sense, the recent financial crisis in Asia and its global ramifications serves to illustrate this fact.

It has been argued that foreign direct investment is more effective in bringing about development than official development assistance. This could be so, but my delegation is concerned that private capital flows are going only to a few selected countries. This leaves the majority of the poor developing countries little hope of extricating themselves from the poverty trap.

Official development assistance is still an important factor in assisting developing countries in their efforts to upgrade infrastructure, which is necessary to attract direct foreign investment. It is unrealistic, therefore, to expect this enormous cost to be met by private capital or domestic savings alone. We therefore urge the developed countries to arrest the trend of diminishing official development assistance and fulfil the official development assistance target of 0.7 per cent of gross national product. We would like to thank those partners that have reached the official development assistance target of 0.7 per cent of gross national product. Others should emulate the example they have set.

Tanzania attaches great importance to South-South cooperation as a means of attaining collective self-reliance and complementing international development cooperation. In this regard, my country will continue to work very closely with other developing countries for the realization of this goal, for we believe that this is the best way for countries of the South to integrate themselves into the global economy.

My delegation urges the international donor community to extend its support to the South-South cooperation arrangements initiated by the developing countries. In particular, countries of the South wish to be assisted in developing capacities in science and technology that are suitable for local conditions.

We call on the United Nations system to continue assisting countries of the South, and in particular the least developed ones, to mobilize the necessary resources to enable them to enter the twenty-first century of science and technology with confidence.

Before concluding my statement, I would like to extend our condolences and sympathy to the Government and people of the many Caribbean island nations, as well as the United States, who have been and continue to be devastated by Hurricane Georges. Our hearts go out particularly to the people of Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Haiti and Puerto Rico, who have suffered the most devastation.

In conclusion, I wish to reiterate our strong belief in and commitment to the United Nations and its aspirations and the principles of the Charter. However, we are conscious of the fact that the strength, or otherwise, of the United Nations will stem from the moral and material support rendered by its Members. This is the challenge we all have to pursue ceaselessly in the interests of international peace and security and for the equitable development of humanity.

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): I now call on the Chairman of the delegation of Antigua and Barbuda, His Excellency Mr. Patrick Albert Lewis.

Mr. Lewis (Antigua and Barbuda): On behalf of the Government and people of Antigua and Barbuda, I would like to congratulate you, Sir, on your election to preside over the General Assembly at this fifty-third session. You are well known to envoys from my country who have worked with you and who can attest to your humanistic and unprejudiced vision of the world. We feel confident that under your guidance this will be a productive session. I likewise wish to express my country's recognition to your predecessor, Hennadiy Udovenko of Ukraine, for the skilful manner in which he conducted the work of the fifty-second session. I also pay tribute to the Secretary-General, who is entrusted with the advancement of this Organization at such a critical time in history. I am also grateful to the Secretariat for scheduling Antigua and Barbuda in this slot.

This year marks the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), of which Antigua and Barbuda is a proud member. Despite the utterances of the prophets of doom, CARICOM did much more than survive, and the areas of cooperation deepened and widened. What started as a free-trade arrangement has expanded, and is now marked by a number of significant institutions in areas such as education and health, as well as in sports and culture. This year the Order of the Caribbean Community award was given to four individuals, among them the former Prime Minister of Antigua and Barbuda, the Right Honourable Vere Cornwall Bird, appropriately dubbed "The father of the Nation". In accepting the award, the former Prime Minister stated:

> "despite the difficulties, we have erected fine institutions — institutions that are a tribute to the resourcefulness of our leaders and the support of the people. But, difficult as they were to build, it is easy for them to be tumbled unless today's leaders and people are prepared to safeguard and preserve them. To do so requires the same vision, the same determination and the same spirit of selflessness that motivated the previous generation."

I assure you, Mr. President, that the spirit that he mentioned is steadfast among us, and that there is no turning back.

Peace, security and disarmament are vital to a safe and secure planet, and the countless individuals who live daily in constant fear, whether in regard to terrorism, hatred between ethnic groups, internecine warfare or religious persecution, give us much concern. Added to that is the expanding nuclear rivalry. The nuclear club is no longer exclusive to the five permanent members of the Security Council. The question to be posed is whether the five long-time nuclear Powers will now accept that the only way to prevent nuclear proliferation is to abolish all nuclear weapons, a factor that has been repeatedly stressed in debates within these hallowed walls and in General Assembly resolutions. Or will the club quickly move beyond the present seven members? We urge that this matter be given the serious consideration it deserves, as we must commit ourselves to future generations. But we are presently dismayed about the future of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) and the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT).

Irrespective of the high praise given to globalization, to most of the developing world it hurts, and hurts excessively. For the past four years — that is, since the establishment of the World Trade Organization (WTO) — disturbing signs have emerged of trends which point in the direction of exclusion rather than inclusion, and of marginalization rather than integration. And these trends are now having a serious negative effect on countries which recently were optimistically viewing their prospects.

The multilateral financial institutions, which provide resources to developing countries at concessional rates, continue, despite numerous protests and logical arguments presented to them, to use gross national product as a basis for judging our economic wherewithal. Somehow, globalization and liberalization will work magic, irrespective of the existing and deep-seated problems of small States, it is assumed. The case of bananas must be highlighted. The undoing of the Lomé trade agreement, with the injury which this hostile act can inflict on the small banana-exporting countries of the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States, of which Antigua and Barbuda is a member, gives grave cause for concern. Small, peace-loving States, causing no harm to

any other State under the terms of the Lomé agreement, have found themselves yoked by the World Trade Organization ruling. Without some form of protection, the banana industry in the CARICOM States could collapse, leading to severe social dislocation, which would ultimately manifest itself in political catastrophe.

The multilateral trading system needs to be fair and equitable, and the imbalances in the present agreements should be rectified. The benefits of the system should accrue to all States in relation to their needs, and not in proportion to their share in international trade. There needs to be recognition of the serious limitations of the principle of reciprocity as an instrument for mutually advantageous trading arrangements when the participating countries have different levels of development. The WTO must contribute to achieving positive coherence in global economic policy.

Widespread and equitably shared economic growth will surely benefit all. In fact, the developed countries will be important beneficiaries of the economic growth and development of developing countries, which will provide larger markets and better opportunities, respectively, for their products and investment. This will also lead to global peace and prosperity, ensuring a truly stable framework for international relations based on mutuality of benefits.

My Government welcomed the twentieth special session of the General Assembly on the world drug problem, held between 8 and 10 June 1998. In the Caribbean the Non-Self-Governing Territories have the same problems in regard to narcotics as the independent countries. There is a multidimensional thrust upon our entities, as there is a challenge to governability by non-State actors and the drug operators. The influence of the drug-traffickers forces our Governments to shift very limited resources from development priorities to law enforcement and the rehabilitation of addicts. The social erosion, economic dislocation and increase in criminal activity mean that for small societies striving to overcome economic vulnerability it becomes a tremendous challenge to maintain functioning institutions in an environment with the potential for decreased productivity.

Quite frankly, there is the possibility for all of us to become the involuntary victims of the drug trade. It is no secret that the small island developing States and low-lying coastal States of the Caribbean have inadequate defences against the vast resources of the drug-traffickers. In addition, if we are not sufficiently fearful of the devastation that can be caused by the illicit traffic in narcotics, we must be gravely concerned about the destruction that can accompany the attendant traffic in small arms and ammunition. In one of the most comprehensive plans of action on Caribbean policy and development, the West Indian Commission noted that nothing poses greater threats to civil society in CARICOM countries than the drug problem; and nothing exemplifies the powerlessness of regional Governments more.

My Prime Minister addressed the issue of powerlessness of regional Governments in a recent statement to the Caribbean Studies Association. In that statement he referred to the dictatorial approach taken by certain countries. Given our limited capabilities, we acknowledge the importance of cooperation to develop mechanisms that can respond to incidents of drug-trafficking. We encourage collaboration, therefore, where appropriate, to achieve the desired results — the apprehension and conviction of criminals.

Allow me to speak briefly on the subject of alternative development policies. Antigua and Barbuda and indeed other Caribbean countries that introduced an offshore financial services sector did so as a direct response to the perceived need to diversify our economies in the face of globalization and trade liberalization. On the one hand, when we choose the financial services sector and follow the example of other countries that have done so before us, we are labelled as havens for money-launderers and corruption, and steps are taken to undermine our efforts and limit the competitive advantage that we may enjoy. We do not believe that this approach lends itself to genuine partnership and mutual respect. What we need is collaboration, information exchange and technical support to assist us in ensuring that our financial services sector is not abused by dubious sources while it provides us with much needed economic resources.

History clearly proves that drug abuse and illicit trafficking know no boundaries; no country is inoculated against their effects. It is logical to conclude, therefore, that the fight against drug-trafficking and abuse must transcend any individual country strategy.

My Government supports an unbiased approach to the United Nations thematic agenda on drug control for the twenty-first century. The decision to focus on demand reduction, elimination of illicit crops, judicial cooperation, money-laundering, stemming illicit production of synthetic drugs and the control of drug-production chemicals must be consistent with the desire for a global strategy against drug-trafficking. The

transnational nature of the drug problem warrants such concerted action to create the drug-free world that we all desire.

Antigua and Barbuda is committed to this global strategy. We have signed a number of interdiction agreements and appointed an official to coordinate national action against drug-trafficking and related crimes. This official works closely with the Attorney General to ensure formulation and implementation of the national drug policy. In addition to the policy initiatives, we are currently completing work on a drug treatment facility that we hope will be used not only as a centre for rehabilitation, but also as a training facility in the region.

It seems logical that a word should be said here in regard to the adoption of the Statute for the International Criminal Court, as Caribbean nations had hoped that such a Court would aid in the elimination of the narcotic scourge. The media did not, to any significant extent, diffuse the idea that it was a Caribbean country, Trinidad and Tobago, that revived the idea for an international criminal court after a lapse of 41 years. In 1989 Trinidad and Tobago reintroduced to the United Nations the concept of 1948.

But the specific reasons for establishing the Court as advanced by Trinidad and Tobago and other States of the Caribbean Community were put on the back burner. We had pleaded for a Court that would try to sentence those involved in the trans-shipment of narcotics, in terrorism and in marine abuses, including the violation of our territorial waters. What is before us is a Court emphasizing genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity and the crime of aggression. All of these we support, yet we are faced with a clear indication that we are still on the periphery.

The West Indies have always been on the periphery of dominant economic systems — in reference, that is, to the post-Columbian era. The West Indies, since the initial period of colonization, have provided goods and services for more advanced industrial entities. The very nature of our colonization — that is, to exist as colonies of exploitation as opposed to colonies of settlement — demanded continued underdevelopment. The sad thing is that, today, the multilateral financial institutions which provide resources to developing countries at concessional rates continue to use gross national product as a basis for judging our economic wherewithal. The present situation in regard to my country provides a most germane example.

The envoys of Antigua and Barbuda are basking in their glory because of the high ranking the country received in the 1998 Human Development Report. The laudations and accommodations received have been profuse, but this very factor puts forward the absurd premise that we are more developed than Mexico or Brazil. Antigua and Barbuda is deemed to be middle-income, and its numerous vulnerabilities are ignored as gross national product is the sole deciding factor. Our challenge is to convince the international agencies that we should be on the priority list for development loans and assistance. Antigua and Barbuda and other Caribbean countries have demonstrated how developing countries can use their limited resources for the advancement of their populations. We should not be penalized for progress.

Small island developing States are constantly and continually at risk, whether through sea-level rise, hurricanes, earthquakes or volcanic eruptions, as has been the case with the emerald isle of Montserrat. A single hurricane can put back our development some 10 years. For ourselves, we have put out a plea for international assistance, as for the third time in three years we have been afflicted by a hurricane. Until the passage of hurricane Georges, our country had been advancing because of the prudent and experienced management for which we are known. We had built a network of superb roads and improved our telecommunications system, tourism had re-established itself after the powerful Hurricane Louis of 1995, new buildings including schools had been erected, and our economy was on course for 8 per cent growth by the end of the year. This, of course, duly manifests the absurdity of using gross national product as a basis for eliminating us from consideration for concessional loans. At present we have to ask our friends and well-wishers for assistance. In that connection, a draft resolution is being circulated on United Nations assistance to Caribbean countries affected by hurricane Georges.

This year we celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. My country will continue to focus on efforts to ensure that the protection of human rights is integrated into all activities of the United Nations system. We view seriously the many reports of child abuse worldwide. We are concerned about children affected by internecine warfare, and the now rampant tales of child labour, child prostitution and child pornography. Additionally, we will remain vigilant in seeing to the mainstreaming of women's concerns. Overall, my country will be exercising efforts to see to

the furtherance of endeavours to strengthen human rights programmes.

In approaching the twenty-first century, the Government of Antigua and Barbuda has decided that it should focus on human capital and its development, rather than focusing narrowly on the economic question. There will be a continuance of the policy of carrying out intense investigations and feasibility studies to decide on where to concentrate limited resources. In addition, even though the Government is divesting itself of some of its holdings and encouraging greater private investment in vital services and commodities, there are some areas, particularly those surrounding technology, in which the Government has to remain directly involved and catalytic; it will continue its practice of seeking consensus to determine key industries and activities that are crucial and critical for development.

In concluding, a statement has to be made in regard to our appreciation for the work done in the Caribbean by the United Nations Development Programme. Particular thanks have to be expressed for its work in economic management and governance initiatives. We will continue to be proud of and to cherish the United Nations, as we recognize its capacity for achievements in areas beyond the reach of national or regional authorities. Subsequently, the nations that compose this Assembly must redouble their collective commitment to translate vision into reality. That is why it is essential to have international cooperation for development in the forefront of our activities. The United Nations is still our greatest hope for peace, development and social justice.

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): The next speaker is His Excellency Mr. Yasser Arafat, Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization and elected President of the Palestinian Authority.

Mr. Yasser Arafat, Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization and elected President of the Palestinian Authority, was escorted to the rostrum.

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): I give the floor to Mr. Yasser Arafat, Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization and elected President of the Palestinian Authority.

Mr. Arafat (Palestine) (*interpretation from Arabic*): For the first time, Palestine is participating in the work of the General Assembly under the agenda item entitled "General debate". That participation is a result of the resolution adopted by the Assembly on upgrading Palestine's representation at the United Nations, which we consider to be an essential step towards full membership.

I would like, at this time, to express the deep gratitude of the Palestinian people to all Member States that supported this important resolution by an overwhelming majority. They have thus reflected the will of the States and peoples of the world for the need to realize justice for the Palestinian people in order to regain their international status and their seat at the United Nations.

I would like to extend to you, Mr. President, our sincere congratulations on your assumption of the presidency of the General Assembly at the fifty-third session. I wish you complete success in your important and noble task during these crucial times in our contemporary world and in our international Organization.

I also extend our gratitude and appreciation to Mr. Hennadiy Udovenko for guiding and presiding effectively over the fifty-second session. I would like in particular to praise his leadership during the resumed tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly on illegal Israeli actions in occupied East Jerusalem and the rest of the occupied Palestinian territories.

It gives me great pleasure to commend the Secretary-General of the United Nations, our friend Mr. Kofi Annan, for his distinguished and wise leadership, and I congratulate him for the many successes he has achieved in several fields. We had the honour, Mr. Secretary-General, of welcoming you a few months ago in our country, Palestine, where you observed and witnessed first-hand the tragedy of the Palestinian people and the suffering they endure as a result of the continuing Israeli occupation of our homeland, Palestine. It is my hope that we will have the opportunity to welcome you in the future under better circumstances: on the day when the occupation has been terminated and Palestine has been restored its freedom.

As we approach the end of the twentieth century, our world is witnessing — and all of mankind is experiencing — great changes and important events, from globalization and the problems of the international financial market to the technological revolution, satellite communications and the information age. All of the rapid

changes that have rocked our contemporary world require the necessary enhancement of our collective work within the framework of the United Nations. This should be done on the basis of the purposes and principles of the Charter and for the bolstering of international cooperation in various arenas and for the acceleration of the North-South dialogue in order to establish a better world where peace, justice and prosperity for all mankind prevail.

Many of the difficult and complicated tasks in this regard have been forced upon us and we must deal with them effectively. We have before us the task of economic and social development — particularly that of the countries of the third world — solving the debt crisis and the problems of poverty, famine, disease and migration in Asia, Africa and Latin America. These challenges require the attainment of international comprehensive measures and equitable relations that are more rational and more just. Many global problems — such as terrorism, drugs, epidemics and organized crime — require strengthening the rule of international law, as well as the establishment of the necessary institutions and mechanisms within the framework of the United Nations.

In this connection, we also welcome the adoption of the Statute of the International Criminal Court, which is an important step in the promotion of law and in putting an end to atrocities and crimes against humanity.

All of these challenges and responsibilities should not prevent us from recalling that many of the basic tasks of the international community in our contemporary world have not yet been accomplished. There are peoples who still remain under foreign occupation — including our Palestinian people, who have been and continue to be exposed to one of the gravest injustices. This great people did not commit a crime; they did not commit aggression against anyone nor did they occupy the land of any other people. However, they were the victims of aggression. Their land was occupied and they were dispersed and compelled by military force to a life in diaspora and exile. There are still 4 million Palestinian refugees living in camps awaiting the realization of international justice and the implementation of resolutions of international legitimacy to accord them justice and put an end to more than half a century of the tragedy of living in exile as refugees.

It is also necessary to exert more effort to resolve many of the regional conflicts and problems — including, of course, those in the Middle East; in the Balkan region, particularly in Bosnia and Herzegovina; in Afghanistan and elsewhere. Special efforts and additional resources are necessary to solve the problems of the African continent in order to allow that great continent to move forward on the path of development and progress. These should include seeking to restore normal conditions in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and achieving peace and stability in the Great Lakes region and the Horn of Africa.

It is also important to consider the issue of sanctions because of its terrible and destructive effects on peoples and on neighbouring States. Here I refer specifically to Iraq, Libya and Sudan. While we call for solutions to these problems and the lifting of sanctions on the basis of the implementation of Security Council resolutions, we cannot but express the feeling of many of us concerning the use of double standards in implementing this principle. In this regard, I would like to express our satisfaction with the progress that has been achieved, in particular with regard to the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya.

Finally, I turn to an extremely important question: the question of nuclear disarmament, weapons of mass destruction and non-proliferation. While strongly supporting the goals of the international community in this regard, we refer in particular to the immense problem existing in our region of the possession by Israel of such weapons, and its refusal to accede to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and place its nuclear installations under the supervision of the International Atomic Energy Agency. The small size of our region and its nature exacerbate the dangers stemming from the continuation of this situation. What occurred recently in South Asia must encourage us all towards sincere cooperation and a commitment to the application of one standard with regard to this issue.

In order to accomplish all of these things, we need a United Nations that is more effective. We support the efforts exerted by many States and the efforts of the Secretary-General in this regard. At the same time, we feel and believe that our goal must go beyond reducing expenditures, downsizing the Secretariat, streamlining the General Assembly and expanding the Security Council, though all of these are important issues. Our goal must go beyond that to achieve the complete democratization of this global Organization. In this context, it is necessary to enhance the role of the General Assembly and also to find solutions to the veto question in the Security Council, particularly its frequent and excessive use. Transparency and clear rules of procedure must prevail in the Council. At this juncture, I should like to remind

the Assembly that since 1973 our question has been subjected to 21 vetoes in the Security Council by one of the permanent members of the Council, the most recent of which occurred in a period of less than two weeks. In short, it is necessary to secure for all Members of the United Nations the ability to contribute effectively on the basis of mutual respect.

Last May, the Palestinian people commemorated the fiftieth anniversary of Al-Nakba, the dispossession and the suffering of the Palestinian people. Despite all of these bitter years, the oldest and largest refugee question in our contemporary world remains unresolved, and our land still suffers under occupation and colonial settlement. Its natural resources are subjected to exploitation, and the city of Al-Quds al-Sharif is still being subjected to Judaization, land confiscation, the demolition of homes, the confiscation of identity cards from its inhabitants, the imposition of a certain demographic composition and artificial administrative measures. There is also the isolation of the city of Bethlehem and the conflict occurring in Al-Khalil — Hebron — and the rest of the Palestinian cities. Eight million Palestinians are still being deprived of their right to exercise sovereignty over their land, a right that the rest of the peoples of the world enjoy.

Despite all of this, despite the long and grave suffering and pain, and with long and legendary steadfastness, our Palestinian people have been able to survive and preserve their national identity. Our people chose the peace option and accepted the will of the international community in this regard. Accordingly, we decided with our Arab brothers to participate in the peace process, which began in Madrid in 1991. Then we took the well-known historical step leading to the Oslo agreement with Israel, which was signed at the White House in Washington, D.C., under the auspices of President Clinton, on 13 September 1993. That development carried the promise of an historic reconciliation and coexistence between the two peoples, the prospect of a new Middle East and the beginning of the establishment of a comprehensive and permanent peace in the region.

Indeed, all parties realized tangible achievements, and the Palestinian people were able to start building their institutions and dealing with the destructive consequences of the long years of occupation. In particular, they held general and democratic elections and established the Palestinian National Authority. Despite all of the difficulties that confronted the process, the general trend to forward progress continued, until the peace process was dealt a severe blow by the assassination of the late Yitzhak Rabin, my partner in the peace process — the peace of the brave — by an Israeli extremist. This was followed by other blows resulting from the bombings and the grave deterioration of the living conditions of our people and deliberate acts to destroy the peace.

When the Government of Benjamin Netanyahu took office in Israel, a new chapter began with its adoption of general political guidelines that were not consistent with the existing agreements. The Government publicly tried to discard the principles of the peace process — Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978) and the principle of land for peace. It ceased implementation of the existing agreements with the exception of the redeployment in Al-Khalil, which was achieved only after intensive American efforts. The Israeli Government continued to prevaricate and refrained from honouring the obligations of the transitional period, which are of great importance to our people, including the safe passage between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, the airport, the seaport; the release of Palestinian prisoners and detainees in Israeli prisons, and the industrial zones. Neither the first stage of redeployment, which was supposed to begin on 7 March 1997, nor the second stage, which was supposed to begin on 7 September 1997, were effected. Both of these, along with the third redeployment — the deadline for which has also been missed since the middle of this year — should have led to the withdrawal of the Israeli army from 90 per cent of our land.

Moreover, this Government's policies of economic suffocation, closure and direct oppression of our people — which costs us about $10 million a day — constitute an economic catastrophe. The Government has continued with the intensification of settlements and the Judaization of Jerusalem, the isolation of Bethlehem and the old city of Al-Khalil, and the disapproval of the operation of the Palestinian airport, safe passage, industrial zones and the seaport, in order to escalate the suffocation and siege of our people and to destroy the peace process.

All of these policies and positions adopted by the Government of Mr. Netanyahu have caused the current dangerous situation and the complete stalemate in the peace process on the Palestinian track, as well as on the Syrian and Lebanese tracks, which have been completely stalemated. These policies and positions have also engendered the general tension prevailing in the region and the danger of descending into complete chaos. The whole world has expressed grave concern at this and has

called upon the Israeli side to change its policies and positions and to comply with the bases of the peace process and implement the existing agreements.

It is high time for the international community, in adherence with international law and in service to peace, to effectively and tangibly pressure the Israeli side to realize the goals of peace, security and stability — not only in the Middle East but internationally. This means implementing the agreements that were signed at the White House under the auspices of President Clinton by the Russian Federation, the United States of America, the European Union, Norway, Egypt and Jordan and in the presence of Japan. It means implementing Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978) and the principle of land for peace, which were the bases of the Madrid Peace Conference.

With the hope of halting the deterioration of the existing situation, the Palestinian side, in cooperation with many of the concerned parties, has recently sought to intensify efforts, particularly with the help of the United States co-sponsor — and especially with the help of President Clinton, to whom we express our gratitude. These efforts resulted in the United States initiative, containing all of the important pending issues, that was submitted to the parties concerned. As delegates are aware, the Palestinian side accepted this American initiative despite the fact that it did not meet our minimum just and legitimate demands. But the Israeli side still rejects this initiative and continues in its attempts to undermine it and pre-empt its contents. President Clinton, thankfully, sent Secretary of State Albright and Mr. Dennis Ross, who have made great efforts to move the peace process forward and protect it.

Despite all these efforts, the Israeli Government has not responded. Hence, we call upon the United States co-sponsor to announce its initiative and to publicly and clearly put the onus on the party that is impeding peace. We also call upon the United States to continue to work effectively in a manner consistent with its responsibilities to the peace process and with its interests and credibility in the Middle East region, and so as to protect the region from the dangers emanating from the destruction of the peace process.

This morning, President Clinton graciously took an important step to save the peace process and to move it forward by convening a meeting at the White House between the Palestinian and Israeli delegations. This was an important meeting to promote and preserve the peace process, and we thank President Clinton for that, particularly as the efforts of the United States will continue to move the process forward and promote the implementation of the signed agreements.

In this context we call upon the other parties concerned, particularly the Russian Federation in its capacity as one of the two co-sponsors of the peace process, as well as China and Japan, to activate and intensify their efforts. We also call upon the European Union, with its economic and political interests and capabilities, to move quickly and effectively to salvage and safeguard the peace process. In this same vein, we call upon all Member States to support the French-Egyptian initiative to convene an international conference of all States determined to save the peace process from the dangerous crisis it has reached.

We have not lost hope for the peace process, and we will continue to honour our obligations in accordance with the existing agreements. At the same time, we will not give up on the necessity of Israeli compliance with those agreements and the need for the Israelis to fulfil their pending obligations. We will not give up our inalienable national rights — the inalienable national rights of the Palestinian people.

At this stage, I wish to extend, on behalf of the Palestinian people, our deep gratitude to all the donor countries and to the World Bank for their valuable contributions aimed at alleviating the suffering of our people and at assisting them in building and developing their homeland and at achieving meaningful economic and social development. I reiterate our gratitude to these countries and the World Bank, particularly because they are contributing despite the obstacles and impediments imposed by Israel in this regard.

It is so difficult to separate the United Nations from the question of Palestine, for this international Organization has been dealing with our cause since its inception. It was the United Nations which partitioned Palestine, and to this time it has not ceased to deal with the results of the events that followed, with the repeated and increasing injustices perpetrated against our people, for which no remedy has yet been found. While reaffirming the permanent responsibility of the United Nations for the question of Palestine, we appeal to all of you to enhance your solidarity and support for our people in the coming period, through these critical circumstances, on the basis of respect for the principles

of the United Nations Charter, international law and international humanitarian law.

We expect that the Conference of the High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 will be convened before the end of this year on measures to apply the Convention to the occupied Palestinian territory, including Al-Quds al-Sharif, in accordance with the recommendations made repeatedly by the tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly of the United Nations.

In this context, we also expect Israeli participation in the work of the fifty-third session of the Assembly to be in conformity with international law, thus ensuring that Israeli credentials do not cover those territories determined by the Security Council and the General Assembly, since 1967, as occupied Palestinian and Arab territories, including occupied East Jerusalem. This is a matter on which there is a consensus by the international community.

From this venue, I would like to call upon all of you, the source of international legitimacy and peacemaking, the guardian of freedom, security and stability and the source for the achievement of justice and prosperity for humankind, to stand by our people, especially as the five-year transitional period provided for in the Palestinian-Israeli agreements will end on 4 May 1999. Our people demand that we shoulder our responsibilities, and they await the establishment of their independent State. This independent Palestinian State must be established as an embodiment of the right of our people to self-determination. I assure you that our people will continue to pursue and protect the peace of the brave in the Middle East. We appeal to you to continue your support for us, as always in the decisive moments of the history, the present and the future of our people. Help us to achieve the national goal of our people in the establishment of their State.

It is not admissible for Israel to continue dominating the Palestinian people. Everyone is aware that 100 per cent peace means 100 per cent security and 100 per cent freedom. One hundred per cent freedom. I repeat — 100 per cent peace, 100 per cent security and 100 per cent freedom. One hundred per cent freedom. If the Israeli Government wants reciprocity, I declare from this podium my demand of them for mutual compliance with the signed agreements, especially in the fields of security and the protection of Palestinians and Israelis against all forms of violence and terrorism and its sources. I invite the Israeli Government to engage in common, serious work between us to address that. There is no alternative to peace. Help us to achieve it.

In the year 2000, the past and the future will meet in Palestine, joined by a global vision of hope and peace for all peoples of the world. On that occasion, the world will celebrate the second millennium of the birth of Jesus Christ — peace be upon him — and the beginning of a new millennium. It is a religious and spiritual occasion of great importance not only for the Palestinian people and the region, but also for all the believers in the world, as well as for the entire international community. The Palestinian people have actually begun serious preparations to celebrate this important religious, historic and international occasion, with the cooperation of many religious, political and social institutions concerned. We call upon you to join us in bearing the responsibility of these preparations, and we invite you to participate directly in the forthcoming celebrations to start together, God willing, a new march.

In this regard, we appreciate the addition by the General Assembly of a new item on its agenda entitled "Bethlehem 2000". We also extend our thanks to the Chairman and members of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for their initiative in this regard. I also take this opportunity to thank its sister Committee, the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People.

I look forward to speaking to you once more when Palestine will have taken its natural place in the community of nations, as an independent State, and when peace will have prevailed in the land of peace and in the entire Middle East.

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): I now call on the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan, His Excellency Mr. Kassymjomart Tokaev.

Mr. Tokaev (Kazakhstan): Allow me to congratulate you, Sir, on your election to the high office of President of the General Assembly at its fifty-third session and to assure you of the full support of the delegation of Kazakhstan in your work.

Kazakhstan, in welcoming the efforts of the Secretary-General to reform the United Nations, supports the decisions adopted by the General Assembly at its last session. The steps taken in that direction will undoubtedly

facilitate the renewal of the Organization in the changing historical conditions.

On the thresho'd of the twenty-first century, the world is becoming an integrated and interrelated system in which there is no room for autarchy and self-isolation. Globalization, which embraces the main spheres of human activity, has radically altered the accustomed assumptions about the realities of modern life. Globalization also compels us to reassess the nature of international cooperation from the standpoint of strengthening multilateral mechanisms for taking decisions on the urgent problems that are of concern to the entire world community. Despite all the diversity of national interests, such decisions need to be taken through joint efforts on the basis of goodwill and consensus, and here the role of the United Nations cannot be underestimated.

On the eve of the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, we again note the permanent significance of that instrument in affirming democratic values and the rule of law.

Kazakhstan, seven years after making its choice of democracy and an open society, is today taking tangible steps to intensify its political reforms. Our country is embarking on a comprehensive programme of democratization that covers such important spheres as elections, political parties, Parliament, civil society, the judicial system, the advancement of women and the mass media. The President of Kazakhstan, Mr. Nursultan Nazarbaev, will be taking decisive steps to solve acute social problems, combat corruption and optimize the State administration.

All these measures are aimed at further protecting and guaranteeing the rights and freedoms of every citizen of our multi-ethnic society. We shall do everything within our power to preserve such values as inter-ethnic harmony and the diversity of the cultures and customs of each of the nationalities that make up the people of Kazakhstan. We shall strengthen pluralism in society in order reliably to guarantee the freedoms of conscience, speech and the press and further to strengthen the foundations of a secular democratic society.

Kazakhstan does not believe that it is possible to build its own statehood without successful integration into the world economy and world politics. In this context, we are developing and strengthening our national financial institutions, which has enabled us to cope, at lower cost, with the consequences of the crisis affecting Asia and the countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS).

As a proponent of a policy of integration, our head of State is a constant advocate of creating the appropriate economic conditions for this to take place and has proposed, as Chairman of the Customs Union, the conclusion of a treaty on the creation of a unified economic space within the CIS.

Kazakhstan, which pursues a policy of constructive cooperation, has created a zone of security and good-neighbourliness around its borders. We are not in confrontation with any State in the world. As a Eurasian State, Kazakhstan sees the development of friendly, equitable and mutually beneficial relations with the countries of the East and the West as a priority of its foreign policy.

We believe that Kazakhstan's voluntary renunciation of its nuclear heritage and its firm adherence to the non-proliferation regime constitute important prerequisites for the attainment of this strategic objective. A few days ago, the second International Conference on the problems of non-proliferation was held in the town of Kurchatov, which is within the territory of the former nuclear testing-ground at Semipalatinsk. During the conference, the last strategic missile launch silo was shut down.

Kazakhstan consistently advocates the creation of security structures on the Asian continent. We note with satisfaction that the initiative of our country's President to convene a conference on interaction and confidence-building measures in Asia is taking solid shape and becoming a tangible factor in present-day international life. This is attested to by the meeting which took place in Almaty in July of the leaders of Kazakhstan, China, the Russian Federation, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan on issues of cooperation and confidence-building measures in the region. We believe that the agreements signed with China on the delimitation of the Kazakh-Chinese border will make a major contribution to strengthening regional security and stability. The Kazakh-Russian Declaration on eternal friendship and alliance for the twenty-first century and the Treaty of eternal friendship between Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan are also of great importance.

Kazakhstan, as a firm proponent of strengthening regional and global security, strongly condemns any undermining of the non-proliferation regime and calls on India and Pakistan to heed the views of the vast majority of the world community and accede without delay to the

Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty and the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. We support the call of the Secretary-General of the United Nations for those countries to join in the negotiations on prohibitions of the production of fissionable materials for nuclear weapons and to refrain from deploying such weapons in their territory. In the context of strengthening regional security and the non-proliferation regime, Kazakhstan will continue to work for the creation of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in Central Asia.

The demonstrations of our country's involvement in the peacekeeping activities of the United Nations include the formation of a peacekeeping battalion in Central Asia and Kazakhstan's participation in the United Nations stand-by arrangements system.

From this high podium, we cannot fail to pay attention to the current situation in Afghanistan. The events taking place there, which are accompanied by mass violations of human rights and the fundamental norms of international law, have become a subject of profound concern to us. Kazakhstan has made and will continue to make its contribution to the achievement of peace in that country. The task of the world community is to convince all the parties to the conflict to cease military action right away and sit down at the negotiating table with a view to establishing a Government of national reconciliation. We are convinced that no military solution to the Afghan problem exists. A peace process in Afghanistan is possible only if interference from outside is halted and full support is given to the efforts of the Secretary-General. Not only immediate neighbours, but all interested countries, must take an active part in the search for ways of solving the Afghan problem.

One of the most difficult present-day problems is international terrorism and organized crime. Kazakhstan rejects terrorism in all its manifestations and is ready to participate in international efforts to combat this evil. On the threshold of the next century, a handful of madmen cannot be allowed to blackmail and endanger the lives and well-being of people who uphold the ideas of creation and peace. This is doubly dangerous in the case of nuclear terrorism.

International organized crime is associated in one way or another with illegal drug-trafficking. Most unfortunately, the scale of the drug business is constantly growing. Drug addiction, moving freely across borders, is undermining statehood and the moral foundations of society. Increasingly, more young people are becoming addicted to drugs. We are witnessing a new phenomenon of drug production becoming a leading component of national economies. Drugs from Afghanistan are to be found in virtually all countries of the world. Accordingly, we support the decisions of the twentieth special session of the General Assembly on international drug control and will participate actively in their implementation.

In speaking of the main problems that ail mankind, we cannot forget separatism. Kazakhstan has more than once stated its position that it does not accept ethnic separatism. Given the calamities it is inflicting on many States, now is the time to declare unambiguously that separatism must be proclaimed outside the law. The right of nations to self-determination cannot under present historical circumstances play the role that it played at the beginning of this century.

Yet another global problem which casts a cloud over the future of mankind is the ever deteriorating environmental situation. Kazakhstan has in all truth experienced the consequences of environmental disasters. From this high podium, the President of Kazakhstan has more than once called on the world community to unify and coordinate efforts to protect the environment. We are grateful to the General Assembly for the support that has been extended to our country, as reflected in the resolution on assistance in overcoming the consequences of the nuclear tests in the Semipalatinsk region.

The Aral Sea disaster has become genuinely global in nature. Deposits of salt from the exposed bed of the Aral Sea have been found in the Arctic Ocean and in Western Europe. While noting with gratitude the assistance from the United Nations, we nevertheless call on the States Members of our Organization to pay greater attention to this serious problem and to take more active and specific steps to solve it.

The peculiarity of the geographical situation of Kazakhstan, and of Central Asia as a whole, confronts us with an acute problem of access to world markets, including the transport of hydrocarbons. Kazakhstan therefore attaches great importance to cooperation with the United Nations and its specialized agencies to develop transit transport systems in the landlocked Central Asian States.

Reviving the traditions of the Great Silk Road, Kazakhstan is interested in expanding and developing transportation networks in Central Asia and beyond. Our country, with its vast territory, is an important link

between Asia and Europe. Our participation in the Transport Corridor: Europe-Caucasus-Asia (TRACECA) project will undoubtedly facilitate an increase in the effectiveness of the transport system in the vast area of the Eurasian continent.

We place great hopes in the United Nations Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia (SPECA), recently adopted by the Economic Commission for Europe and the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific.

Kazakhstan, as the Chairman of the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO), intends to make a real contribution to stepping up the activity of this important regional forum. The Declaration and other documents adopted at the ECO summit in Almaty creates good prerequisites for the creation of a favourable trade climate in relations between the ECO member countries and their potential partners in Europe and Asia. We believe that ECO is a promising organization and has great potential for expanding economic ties in the territories of 10 States with a total population of more than 300 million people. Kazakhstan will work for the further strengthening of cooperation between the ECO and the United Nations.

Another issue that must be included among today's urgent problems is the legal status of the Caspian Sea. We note with satisfaction the progress made in reaching consensus on this complex and delicate subject, which affects the interrelations among the five littoral States. The agreement signed between Kazakhstan and the Russian Federation in July this year on the delimitation of the northern part of the Caspian Sea lays the foundations for a complete settlement of the Caspian problem. It is now important to take concrete steps for the implementation of this instrument, which is in conformity with the provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.

A solution of the Caspian problem is of strategic importance for Kazakhstan. We are interested in reliably ensuring the export of our mineral resources through multiple-option oil-gas pipelines. We expect early implementation of the Caspian Pipeline Consortium project, and we believe that the construction of an oil pipeline from western Kazakhstan to China offers promising prospects. We support the trans-Caspian project for an oil and gas pipeline, Baku-Ceyhan, and we view the project for an oil pipeline through the territory of Iran as very promising.

It must be noted with regret that mankind will be entering the next century burdened by many serious problems. But, at the same time, there are no grounds for unrelieved pessimism, since the passing century, which witnessed two world wars, the development and testing of lethal types of weapons and a multiplicity of regional and ethnic conflicts, has developed reliable mechanisms — our Organization first among them — for preventing and settling international problems. The cause of peace, security and development is of concern to all States. We must, therefore, all act as a united whole. Kazakhstan is ready to take part in this work for peace and cooperation.

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): I now call on His Excellency Mr. Ahmed Attaf, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Algeria.

Mr. Attaf (Algeria) (*interpretation from Arabic*): A unanimous tribute has been paid to you, Sir, and, through you, to your country, Uruguay, by your election to the presidency at this session of the General Assembly. I am pleased to join in that tribute by congratulating you on this well-deserved distinction and wishing you all success in the discharge of your mission.

I should also like to pay tribute to your predecessor, Mr. Udovenko, who was able to meet our expectations in exemplary fashion at a time when our Organization was embarking on a course of reform. Mr. Kofi Annan has fully committed himself, with imagination and courage, to that same course of reform, and he has succeeded in making strides that call for our sincere expression of gratitude and recognition.

Mr. Mungra (Suriname), Vice-President, took the Chair.

That reform is now on the right course. It is meeting the collective expectations that have been expressed. But more than that, it comes at the right moment, just as new problems are arising to test our skills in diagnosing the new challenges and in formulating policies that are capable of responding to these challenges and aspirations.

However new these problems may be, they are a natural consequence of humanity's progress towards the fulfilment of its destiny. They have arisen out of the unprecedentedly swift changes that have taken place in international relations for a full decade.

These problems have names. They present challenges that were heretofore unknown to us, and they

demand solutions that go beyond our customary frameworks of thought, analysis and action. Let us first identify these problems by their names: globalization, interdependence, development, peace and collective security.

These are but workshops which nourish our diverse debates and contradictory approaches. They raised certainties on the part of some and doubts and warnings on the part of others. Until now, the debate has been limited to exchanges of ideas, confined to the approaches or projections that each of us has formulated from our own perspectives, our own calculations and our own national interests. Today, the facts themselves have been determined. It is incumbent upon us to confront what yesterday was nothing but conjecture and today is a living reality, in keeping with the principles and ideals of the United Nations which our countries embody.

This is the case with globalization, which was long presented to us as being capable of ensuring universal prosperity, and to which was attributed the virtue of limitless growth. However, many of our countries have expressed their doubts, their warnings of the dislocations and dangers which would result from a globalization which lacks the least means of appropriate regulation, coordination and monitoring. In the absence of such instruments of regulation, coordination and monitoring, and given the acknowledged shortcomings of the existing mechanisms, globalization rightly gives rise more often to doubts and fears than to support and conviction.

There is no better illustration of the tragic consequences which could result from those dislocations than the Asian crisis, the results of which are still unfolding, threatening the economies of many regions of the world to such a degree that the spectre of widespread recession has re-emerged. In fact, rather than being a force for integration, globalization has turned into a force for exclusion and marginalization.

This state of affairs forces us to think collectively about how to reimbue globalization with its original and ideal purpose so that it can meet the aspirations placed in it for universal progress in justice and solidarity. Globalization represents a comprehensive challenge which must be met by comprehensive regulation, coordination and dialogue. Until then, the existing mechanisms must be strengthened in their assigned functions of prevention and interposition.

Finally, regional integration as an integral component of a well-balanced and carefully monitored globalization, must be accompanied by bold and effective initiatives.

The problem of interdependence is structurally linked to that of globalization. The arrival of an age of interdependence among nations has fed the great hope of creating and diversifying the bonds that are necessary for expanding the area of cooperation and exchange among our countries. However, the erosion of international cooperation for development, as well as the imbalances in the present system of world economic relations, still represent basic impediments on the road to crystallizing true interdependent relationships.

At the core of the problem of globalization and interdependence is development — a crucial problem, which has not yet received the attention that is due to it. On the contrary, it is increasingly marginalized in our discussions today, as well as in the design of world economic policies.

Finally, the problem of peace and collective security has encountered new challenges other than those with which it was identified before and which still exist till today.

From this perspective, I speak of the phenomenon of terrorism. Terrorism has no respect for human life and is capable of perpetrating the most vile crimes against humankind. By its logic of terror, death and destruction, it seeks to strike at the foundations of every civilized society. For these reasons, terrorism is truly characterized as the most serious threat to our societies and the nations of the world as a whole.

Terrorism is a global phenomenon which calls for a global response from the international community. Algeria is pleased to note that after having underestimated and incorrectly analysed terrorism for a long time, the international community increasingly seems to be more cognizant of its dangers and aware that the time has come to supplement unilateral and isolated action on the part of States fighting terrorism with collective and resolute action.

With this perspective in mind, conditions are now right for us to go beyond mere verbal condemnation of terrorism to ensure that intentions and actions would really go hand in hand through effective international cooperation whose goal is to fight terrorism. The

elimination of this scourge is no longer a mere moral obligation for humankind. It has also become a political necessity in an age of interdependence and globalization.

For that reason Algeria believes that the time has come to give serious consideration to the preparation of a global convention to prevent and fight all acts of terrorism and to serve as a legal framework for the organization and implementation of international cooperation in that matter. Such a project should take shape as of now in the form of concerted and sustained action on the part of the entire international community to dismantle terrorism's multifaceted support networks and rear bases, dry up its financial resources and bring to trial the perpetrators of terrorist acts and their accomplices and abettors. The convening of a world summit on terrorism, which received broad support in this Assembly, would be a basic step in that direction. Algeria fully supports the idea of such a summit and stands completely ready to make its contribution to it.

In view of Algeria's belonging to several spheres — the Maghreb, the Mediterranean, the Arab and the African — it has constructed its foreign policy on the principles of openness, solidarity, good-neighbourliness and cooperation. Algeria embodies these principles in its immediate environment, the Maghreb, convinced that only a united Maghreb community would serve the cause of peace, stability and the development of the countries of our region.

These same principles have moved Algeria to tireless support for a just and definitive solution to the conflict in Western Sahara. We fully support the United Nations settlement plan, in cooperation with the Organization of African Unity, which calls for the holding of a free, fair and impartial referendum on self-determination.

Like the rest of the international community, Algeria welcomes the Houston accord, through which the two parties to the conflict, the Kingdom of Morocco and the POLISARIO front, solemnly agreed on the practical modalities for implementing the provisions of the settlement plan under the auspices of the United Nations. Today, one year after the conclusion of that accord, and despite the real, significant progress resulting, in large part, from the efforts of the Secretary-General, of his Personal Envoy Mr. James Baker, and of his Special Representative, serious obstacles still stand in the path to the plan's implementation. If they are not overcome, these obstacles, which the Secretary-General has clearly identified in successive reports, along with their causes, could seriously compromise the chances of holding the long-awaited referendum.

Therefore it is now necessary to solemnly and urgently appeal for full and strict respect for the commitments undertaken and to reaffirm the responsibility of the United Nations, in particular the Security Council, with regard to the full and strict implementation of the settlement plan and the Houston accord so as to ensure that the people of the Western Sahara can exercise their inalienable right to self-determination.

As in the Maghreb, Algeria has been working in the Mediterranean to ensure that there will be an atmosphere of stability, peace, cooperation and prosperity. The machinery for consultation and cooperation that was set up through the Barcelona process has opened new horizons for the development of a true partnership between the two shores of that shared sea, a partnership directed towards developing a zone of shared prosperity in the Mediterranean. In this context, Algeria undertook negotiations on an agreement of association with the European Union aimed at putting in place the conditions necessary for renewed and mutually beneficial cooperation between the two parties.

Within the same Mediterranean region, and after the launching of the peace process which raised great hopes, feelings of anxiety and pessimism have again returned since the peace mechanism has become stalemated.

The Israeli Administration, by reneging on commitments made in Oslo and Washington, by abandoning the principle of land for peace, by continuing its settlement policy and by repeatedly attacking the integrity and sacredness of Al-Quds Al-Sharif, has led to the undermining of the peace process, rekindling the frustrations and anger of the Palestinian people and threatening the entire region with a return to the era of confrontation which prevailed there for more than 40 years.

In order to deal with this perilous situation, we must recall that the just, comprehensive and lasting settlement to the conflict in the Middle East requires the full and unconditional withdrawal of Israeli forces from all the Palestinian and occupied Arab territories and the exercise of the right of self-determination by the Palestinian people, including the establishment of its own State with Al-Quds as its capital.

In the same part of the world, the suffering of the brotherly Iraqi people continues to dismay us. In this regard, we cannot but reiterate our call for the rapid lifting of the embargo on Iraq. Similarly, we renew the same call with regard to the brotherly Libyan people, who are also the victims of cruel economic sanctions, which we hope will be lifted soon, in view of the recent positive developments in the Lockerbie case.

In its relations with its African neighbours, as in its relations with other African countries, Algeria has always worked to ensure that there will be strong bonds of cooperation and solidarity with a view to achieving the political and economic unification of the continent. Intrastate and inter-State conflicts in Africa can only damage this ambitious and legitimate project. We therefore call for the settlement of these conflicts and crises by utilizing existing African mechanisms, particularly the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution, on the basis of respect for the territorial integrity and sovereignty of States and also the frontiers inherited from colonialization.

For a decade Africa has been making profound political, economic and social reforms for which the international community must provide resolute and meaningful support, as the Secretary-General of our Organization called for in his comprehensive and thorough report.

In less than two months the international community will be celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Such anniversaries provide a good opportunity for collective self-review, which impels us to acknowledge that in the field of human rights, the situation is certainly much better than it was 50 years ago. The people's liberation movement and the global spread of democracy have certainly played a crucial role in promoting and consolidating human rights.

There can be no doubt that the significant progress made in democratization and the establishment within the State of the rule of law will remain fragile and will be endangered unless they are accompanied by meeting the economic, social and cultural needs of the citizens. This is because true democracy cannot take root permanently and soundly in places of deprivation and want.

In this connection and in the name of my country, I wish to reaffirm our strong attachment to the universality, interdependence and indivisibility of human rights and our resolute commitment to promote them free from any manipulation or politicization.

If we wish to sum up these complex and multifarious challenges facing mankind today, this could be done through one essential question: how can we make sure that the evolving new world order will be more just and more secure, will have greater solidarity and will truly address the interests and aspirations of everyone?

That is the question which, of course, involves our country, and through it, mankind as a whole. And what better forum to answer this question is there than the United Nations, which brings us together and through whose Charter we have proclaimed our determination "to practise tolerance and live together in peace with one another as good neighbours, and to unite our strength to maintain international peace and security, and ... to employ international machinery for the promotion of the economic and social advancement of all peoples".

The challenges of the present are embodied in these basic values and these shared purposes. In fact, the primacy given to these values and the attainment of these purposes are contingent on our ability to mobilize our collective energies. Mankind, which has mastered science and technology, has achieved considerable progress in the utilization of the resources of our world and has established its control over the means of its progress. Now it has in its hands the keys to its destiny. Using the keys to its destiny for the common good depends on humankind, and on humankind alone.

The Acting President: I call on His Excellency Mr. Momodou Lamin Sedat Jobe, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs of the Gambia.

Mr. Jobe (Gambia): My delegation would like first of all to congratulate the President on his assumption of the presidency for this session. We know full well that the tasks that lie ahead are indeed challenging, but we are confident that with his vast experience and wisdom he will discharge his responsibilities successfully. Whilst we wish him luck, let me also reassure him of the full cooperation of our delegation at all times.

In the same vein, we would also like to congratulate his predecessor, Mr. Hennadiy Udovenko, for the admirable manner in which he conducted the activities of the Assembly during the fifty-second session.

My delegation is very proud of Mr. Kofi Annan, our able Secretary-General, for the efficient manner in which he has been running the affairs of our Organization. His impressive contributions in the field of preventive diplomacy, as amply demonstrated on numerous occasions, are worthy of praise. Likewise, in the delicate business of reforms he is equal to the task, for no sooner did he assume office than he embarked on the reform of the United Nations. His success is our success, and therefore we will lend him our full support in our common endeavour to revitalize the Organization and make it more relevant to the realities of these changing times.

We in the Gambia have also been busy with the transformation of our own society under the dynamic and enlightened leadership of President Yahya A. J. J. Jammeh, whose ideal it is to serve the youth and people of Africa by endeavouring to help them to realize their aspirations for peace, stability and justice and progress in socio-economic development. Since we renewed our new democratic tradition, every effort is being made to consolidate this process in an orderly way, mindful of the fact that better and lasting results will be achieved only through a systematic approach.

Moreover, cultivating democracy in the midst of poverty is not an easy task because democracy is, after all, about participation. If the basic needs of the people are not satisfied, they are simply not interested in any political process. Conscious of this hard reality, the Government of President Jammeh quickly put in place a programme of socio-economic development to empower the people and their families, placing great emphasis on social sectors such as health, education and agriculture. In this way, an impressive number of schools have been built around the country, and now we can boast of providing schools for all communities in the Gambia. Health facilities are within reach of all Gambians and are also affordable.

May I at this juncture, on behalf of my Government, express our most sincere gratitude to the Governments of those friendly States — in particular, the Federal Republic of Nigeria, Cuba, Egypt and the Republic of China on Taiwan — for the medical assistance they continue to give us during these times of need. This is a meaningful South-South cooperation worthy of emulation.

I am only attempting to share our perception of what inter-State relations should be: caring, sharing, consulting and cooperating for the mutual benefit of all. I cannot think of a better way of cooperation between States for mutual economic development in a world in which the gap between the rich and the poor continues to expand. Now, whilst we are concerned with bridging this gap, we are overwhelmed by another hurricane-like phenomenon, called globalization and liberalization.

Globalization and liberalization were recognized by many to hold many attractions. They were perceived to be the gateway to the integration of developing countries into the global economy. We however observe that while they are yielding ample benefits for developed countries, they have further widened the gap between developed and developing countries, as well as the inequality gap between rich and poor. Their impact on employment and socio-economic development in general has been largely negative.

We are concerned at this growing marginalization of the least developed countries in world trade. The volume of our total exports continues to be under 0.4 per cent of global exports. Increased globalization is further worsening the situation. This negative trend merits coordinated action to alleviate the situation. In this context, we welcome the General Assembly's decision to hold the first high-level dialogue for two days earlier this month on the theme of the social and economic impact of globalization and interdependence and their policy implications. We hope that this meeting will have brought about active engagement of both developed and developing countries, in a spirit of genuine partnership, with a view to reaching a meaningful and successful conclusion and strengthening international economic cooperation for development. Globalization and liberalization must be managed through concerted international effort in order to avoid the further marginalization of developing countries.

The overwhelming burden of external debt today poses one of the most challenging and daunting problems for developing countries. Much has been said about this, and very little has been done to alleviate the problem. We believe that there is a dire need for new financial flows to debtor developing countries, in addition to debt relief measures that include cancellation and concessional financial assistance to enable developing countries to reduce their debt overhang.

In this context, we welcome the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative and encourage early and urgent application of its measures. We would also encourage any refinements of the initiative to reduce the structural adjustment period to three years, to increase the debt

reduction level to 90 per cent and to ease the terms for reduction of multilateral debt.

The least developed countries have always received the attention and support of the international community, particularly with the adoption of the Paris Declaration and Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the 1990s. The realization of the primary objectives of the Programme — to arrest and reverse the deterioration in the socio-economic conditions in the least developed countries — so far remains elusive. The lack of progress in this regard is attributable in the main to the failure of the international community to fulfil its commitments. We hope that the declaration of the ministers of least developed countries at this year's session will encourage our development partners to come forward and work with us in a genuine partnership.

Poverty, deprivation and environmental degradation are the greatest evils facing developing countries today. We agree with the analysis of the Secretary-General in his report on the causes of conflict and the promotion of durable peace and sustainable development in Africa, in particular with regard to the interrelationship between development and peace.

Today, the world is besieged with conflicts, both inter- and intra-State. From the Balkans to the Great Lakes region, human beings continue to prey on one another with guns and knives, machetes and all other sorts of weapons. Unfortunately, women and children suffer the most from these conflicts. We cannot continue to allow this to go on. The time has come when people have to take individual responsibility for crimes they have committed against humankind. Ethnic violence and human rights abuses, a common feature of present day conflicts, cannot be countenanced and cannot be committed with impunity.

My delegation supports fully the resolve of the international community to deal with the problem, and in this context welcomes the establishment of the International Criminal Court. We share the philosophy of Benjamin B. Ferencz, a former Nuremberg prosecutor, that

> "there can be no peace without justice, no justice without law, and no meaningful law without a court to decide what is just and lawful under any given circumstances".

The establishment of the International Criminal Court will ensure that henceforth humanity's response to crimes against humanity will be swift and will be just. Henceforth, no army, no ruler, no junta anywhere can abuse human rights with impunity. The people and the Government of the Gambia look forward to the coming into effect of the statute of the International Criminal Court.

One of the most cherished aspirations of our Organization is to ensure that all men live in peace. The attainment of international peace and security therefore remains one of the most vital preoccupations of our noble Organization. It is for these reasons that my delegation joins the rest of the international community in supporting the efforts of the United Nations to ensure peace and the resolution of conflicts around the world.

My delegation would like to take this opportunity to commend the members of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and its Military Observer Group (ECOMOG) and other regional and subregional arrangements in Africa and beyond for the good work they continue to do in their bid to ensure peace and security. My delegation is particularly thankful to ECOWAS for the restoration on 10 March 1998 of the legitimate and constitutionally elected Government of Sierra Leone. We are still concerned that the rebels have up to this moment refused to lay down their arms. We urge the international community to assist the Government of Sierra Leone in its effort to restore control over all its territory and to concentrate its energies on national reconciliation, reconstruction and economic development. In this regard, my delegation welcomed the holding of the Special Conference on Sierra Leone that was held here in New York at the initiative of the Secretary-General and which we hope will contribute to the process of national reconciliation.

In neighbouring Guinea-Bissau, we hope that the joint peace initiative of ECOWAS and the Community of Portuguese Language Countries will bear fruit, leading to a final settlement of the dispute. In this context, we recognize the need to respect the ceasefire agreed upon in Praia, Cape Verde, on 26 August 1998, which we consider to be an important step in enhancing peace and security in the West African subregion.

The Government of the Gambia is concerned over the number, intensity and interrelationship among conflicts in Africa, and especially at the emergence of new conflicts during the past year. The border conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea, the resurgence of conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the impasse in the peace process in Angola, the continued violence by the rebels in Sierra Leone, and the complex humanitarian

emergencies in Guinea-Bissau, Somalia and Sudan, among other problems, cause grave concern to us.

In addition to what I have just said, we are also concerned at the difficulties attendant upon the present conflict situations in Africa, in particular human rights abuses, refugee outflows and the humanitarian needs of innocent persons affected by such conflicts, in particular women and children. The international community, in responding to these conflict situations, must address these issues and the root causes of the conflicts, including in particular the troubling issues of children in armed conflict and the flow of small arms. In this context, my delegation welcomes the actions taken by the Security Council to address these issues following the report of the Secretary-General on Africa. We hope that there will be a United Nations-wide approach to tackle these important issues.

The Lockerbie issue has dragged on for too long. It is about time that a settlement was reached so that the people of the great Libyan Arab Jamahiriya can be relieved of the bite of the excruciating sanctions imposed against them. In accordance with the position taken by the Organization of African Unity, the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries, the Organization of the Islamic Conference, the League of Arab States and other regional organizations, the Government of the Gambia welcomes the concurrence of the Governments of the United Kingdom and of the United States of America to the proposal to have the two Lockerbie suspects tried in a neutral country, the Netherlands. Consequently, the Government of the Gambia reaffirms its full support for the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya in its bid to secure a fair and just trial for the two suspects.

In the light of the recent developments, in the quest to alleviate the immense suffering caused by the economic sanctions imposed on the Libyan nation by Security Council resolutions 748 (1992) and 883 (1993), and to avert any further tightening of sanctions on the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, the Government of the Gambia is desirous of the urgent finalization of the arrangements for a lasting solution to this long-drawn-out problem.

Following a review, therefore, of the latest correspondence on the matter between the Governments of the United Kingdom and the United States of America and the Secretary-General, and the agreement concluded between those two countries and the Government of the Netherlands relating to arrangements for the transfer of the suspects to the Netherlands and their trial there, the Government of the Gambia is of the view that the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya must be given the opportunity to make an assessment of those documents in order to ensure that its views and concerns are fully taken into consideration with regard to the final arrangements.

Whilst acknowledging the great lengths that all parties have gone to in order to ensure that justice is meted out — and this at the earliest possible opportunity — my country firmly believes that Libya should have a greater input into the final arrangements regarding the hand-over of the two Lockerbie suspects and, most important, that the appropriate guarantees for a just and fair dispensation of justice should prevail. This would be in the spirit of the decision taken in Ouagadougou by the heads of State of the Organization of African Unity at their last summit.

My Government would like to see justice done and the real culprits in the Lockerbie bombing identified and brought to trial very quickly. However, whilst we persist in urging that Libya be associated fully in the quest for mutually acceptable conditions of transfer of the two suspects to the Netherlands and trial there, we will also insist on the need to have all the proof of their direct involvement in this tragic affair being provided to us in the first place. As soon as a reasonable and acceptable *terrain d'entente* is reached, the sanctions must be lifted immediately and unconditionally.

The Gambia's foreign policy is directed by its national interest and that of the continent, as well as by the quest for peace and justice in the world. As members of the Security Council, we are obliged to ask some pertinent questions when certain actions and initiatives have a devastating impact on the lives of human beings. One such issue for which we would want straightforward and clear answers relates to the recent bombing by the Government of the United States of a pharmaceutical complex in Khartoum.

What my Government seeks to know in this respect is whether, assuming in good faith that the complex was indeed involved in the production of deadly and prohibited substances, the Government of the United States fully weighed the consequences of such a terrible strike on the innocent people of the Sudan before sanctioning the bombings. In other words, in the view of the United States Government, did the satisfaction derived from the destruction of the complex in the Sudan outweigh the value and premium placed on the lives of innocent men, women and children on the scales of their

moral values? This matter has to be investigated so that the international community's conscience may be at peace.

About the Middle East, we are disappointed that the peace process, which gave so much hope, has virtually collapsed. This undesirable state of affairs does not diminish our faith in the peace process. We recognize the right of all peoples to self-determination. We therefore respect the rights of the Palestinian people to emerge fully as an independent sovereign State. In this context, we welcome the adoption by the General Assembly of resolution 52/250 on the participation of Palestine in the work of the United Nations. We look forward to the day when Palestine joins the ranks of other States as a fully fledged Member of the United Nations.

It is the wholehearted belief of my delegation that every people has a right to self-determination. This belief inspires the Gambia's strong support for the aspirations of the 21.3 million people of the Republic of China on Taiwan to exercise their right to share and participate in the activities of the United Nations. The legitimacy of their aspirations, both legal and moral, has been reinforced by similar actions and measures taken by the United Nations on the issue of parallel representation, which now stands as a useful reminder.

We believe, in the same vein, that the people of Cuba have an inalienable right to determine their destiny. The practice of unilateral imposition of sanctions by one Member State against another should end with the demise of the cold war. As we enter the new millennium, all States should be committed to shaping a better world, a world wherein all States, big or small, are equal, a world in which relations between States are based on mutual respect and strict observance of international law.

The situation between Iraq and Kuwait continues to be one of the most important issues before the United Nations. We would wish to stress the need to have this matter resolved expeditiously. We hope that those who have influence on Iraq will be able to secure its compliance with its international obligations and that it will resume cooperation with the United Nations and its bodies.

In this respect, we urge the release of all prisoners of war, including missing Kuwaiti nationals and third country nationals. We encourage sincere cooperation with the International Committee of the Red Cross for that purpose. We also call for the return of the properties of the Government of Kuwait, including official documents removed from their national archives.

My delegation is also concerned about the humanitarian situation in Iraq and the dire plight of the Iraqi people. We encourage Iraq to cooperate fully with the United Nations, which would end the present logjam and pave the way for a comprehensive review of the sanctions.

All of us remain concerned about the ongoing conflict in Afghanistan. We believe that there is no military solution to the conflict there. We urge all Afghan factions to find a political settlement to the conflict, under the auspices of the United Nations, which addresses all the interests and concerns of all the people of Afghanistan.

Let me at this juncture reiterate my Government's condemnation of the killing of Iranian diplomats in Afghanistan. We hope that the perpetrators of this heinous crime will be pursued and brought to justice.

As we approach the new millennium, we are confronted with long-drawn-out conflicts and new ones that are emerging. Our world is thus far from being a peaceful and quiet place. At this stage in our history, we must all strive to enter the twenty-first century as a united, peaceful family that can proudly bequeath to future generations a developed, secure world where democracy, justice and equality are guaranteed to everyone, irrespective of origin, race, religion or political persuasion. We hope that the Proclamation of the year 2000 as the International Year for the Culture of Peace, which was first suggested by the Gambia during the 1997 session, will bear fruitful results.

Apart from the numerous conflicts, old and new, my delegation is also concerned about the drug menace, which threatens the very fabric of our societies. This problem has now assumed monumental proportions, leaving no society safe from its lethal and tenacious tentacles.

We believe that all of us have a stake in this problem — big and small States alike. We must therefore join forces as a common front in our battle against this evil. The Government of the Gambia is committed to curbing the problem of drugs in its territory and will continue to cooperate with all countries in that regard.

The Government of the Gambia welcomed the twentieth special session of the General Assembly on the world drug problem held in New York from 8 to 10 June 1998. We also fully support the Political Declaration, the

Declaration of the Guiding Principles of Drug Demand Reduction and the action plans adopted at the special session.

We wish to reiterate our concern for the growing and dangerous links between terrorist groups, drug-traffickers and their paramilitary gangs, which have resorted to all types of violence, thereby undermining the democratic institutions of States and violating human rights.

In addition to the drug menace, the international community is faced with another challenge: international terrorism. The Government of the Gambia condemns terrorism in all its forms and manifestations. While we again extend our sympathy to the injured and to the families bereaved as a result of the recent bombings in Kenya, Tanzania and South Africa, we call on all countries to work together to fight against the scourge of terrorism.

The issue of anti-personnel landmines and its attendant consequences is of concern. My delegation welcomes the coming into force of the Ottawa treaty banning anti-personnel landmines.

With the end of the cold war, nuclear disarmament should be given priority in our efforts to ensure the safety of humankind. In this context, my delegation is encouraged by what India and Pakistan said about signing the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty. We join those who call for a negotiated and phased programme for the complete elimination, by all countries, of nuclear weapons.

In order for us all to enter into the new millennium with our collective vision for a better world, we will obviously need to reform and revitalize our Organization to make it more relevant and more responsive to the challenges of contemporary times. This idea has indeed taken hold, leading to the consideration of reform measures proposed by Secretary-General Kofi Annan in his report "Renewing the United Nations: A programme for reform".

May I take this opportunity to pay tribute to our able Secretary-General for his unswerving commitment to the reform of our Organization and his cooperation in this regard. It is our fervent hope that the success of any reform programme for the United Nations will be judged by the ability of the Organization to make a significant impact on the lives of all people, in particular those of the developing countries, as well as by real improvements in its functioning.

In this context, we feel very strongly that reform measures should focus mainly on strengthening the role of the Organization in the promotion of peace and development. Any such reform programme should address the need to enable the Organization to meet the challenges of modern times and preserve the sanctity and centrality of the principles of the Charter.

The last session witnessed a lot of debate on this issue. It is sad to note, however, that no substantial progress has been made. As we pursue this important task, we hope that the Assembly will defeat the hostile offensive which seeks to portray it as a "house of words". Any concrete and workable decisions that may evolve out of our deliberations on this issue will serve as the litmus test of the political will of the membership to forge ahead with genuine renewal and revitalization of the Organization.

No reform of the United Nations would be complete without the reform of the Security Council — the main organ responsible for the maintenance of international peace and security. While some consensus has emerged on a number of issues on the question of equitable representation and increase in the membership of the Security Council, important differences still exist on many other issues. We urge Member States to continue to negotiate constructively on the outstanding issues with a view to arriving at a compromise that is agreeable, if not satisfactory, to all.

Finally, as we continue to grapple with the reform of the United Nations and its organs after 50 years of operation, so must we also continue to address the weaknesses, inequalities and inadequacies that plague the international economic and social system, global trade, finance, investment, international development, and so on. We must continue to do this so as to achieve more meaningful cooperation and partnership geared towards the promotion of socio-economic development and the preservation of human rights and fundamental freedoms for all.

It therefore bears recalling that the important issues of women in development and the rights of the child should continue to be at the top of the international agenda. In this endeavour, development must be given the priority it deserves. Africa, Asia and Latin America must be given the opportunity to emerge from their devastating past into a future which guarantees for them all the benefits of democracy and peace, respect for

human rights, development and the restoration of the dignity of all their peoples.

This objective is realizable if we all work together, drawing inspiration from the Charter of the United Nations. North and South, rich and poor, together we can do it — if we believe in it.

The United Nations provides the forum and the necessary framework to achieve the objectives that we set for ourselves on this small planet that we share. Before the United Nations was founded, the world experienced bitterly two devastating wars. When the United Nations was founded half a century ago, it helped to avoid another global war despite the cold war that ensued. Today, in this post-cold-war era in which we are confronted with localized ethnic and internal political strife, we need the United Nations more than ever before.

This world body has withstood the test of time and history. There is no alternative to the United Nations; countries big and small, rich or poor, all have a vital stake in strengthening the United Nations rather than weakening it. The United Nations is more relevant today than it has ever been, and we all should strive for its vitality and the respect of its decisions. We can do this only when it is clear in the minds of all that it is the common house of all the States of the world and that it should be perceived as being just and fair to all, in particular in the resolutions adopted by its Security Council. These resolutions should always be in the spirit of fraternal cooperation and understanding that prevail here in this General Assembly Hall.

We in the Gambia remain very optimistic, and we know we share this optimism because the General Assembly is the asylum of humanity at large against the cruelty and pain of the outer world.

The Acting President: The next speaker is the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Kyrgyzstan, His Excellency Mr. Muratbek Imanaliev, on whom I now call.

Mr. Imanaliev (Kyrgyzstan) (*interpretation from Russian*): Allow me to congratulate Mr. Didier Opertti on his election to the important post of President of the General Assembly at this session. This is a testimony to the widespread recognition of the country that he represents. I am convinced that his rich experience and diplomatic skill will allow him to successfully conduct this session of the Assembly and deal with the important tasks before it.

I would also like to express my sincere thanks to the President of the General Assembly at its fifty-second session, the former Minister for Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, Mr. Udovenko, for his fruitful work over the past year.

It would be difficult to underestimate the importance of the United Nations in the fields of peace and security, development, human rights, ecology and economic cooperation. Kyrgyzstan wishes deeply to see the Organization successfully reformed. The Secretary-General's "quiet revolution" of institutional reforms, begun a year ago, has given new strength to the United Nations mechanism.

The first, most important steps towards making this revolution a success have already been taken, but a great deal remains to be done. As the previous session showed, the process of reforming the Organization so that it is prepared to respond to the challenges of the coming millennium will require more time and more work than expected.

The reforms of the United Nations will be incomplete if they do not apply to all of its organs, including the Security Council. We judge the Council by its effectiveness. In that connection, we support the Secretary-General's proposal to expand the role of the Council. We share his view that the Council should deal with economic and social processes, which have an impact on peace and security, just as energetically as it works to resolve political issues. We also believe it essential not only to improve the working methods of the Council, but also to expand its membership. In our opinion, the quantitative expansion of the Council should take place in both categories of membership and provide for equitable geographic representation. Further, the new permanent members of the Council should have all the privileges appropriate to their status.

The difficult reform process that all aspects of Kyrgyz society have been undergoing during the seven years of our independence has yielded certain results. The main result has been the preservation of political stability, further democratization of the society and the extension of economic reforms.

Lacking access to the sea, Kyrgyzstan is seeking new transport routes, which are essential for facilitating the movement of goods, capital and services into the region. It is acquiring new information technology and electronic communications, which will help the country

modernize. Kyrgyzstan wishes to develop regional cooperation within the framework of the Central Asian economic community and the Commonwealth of Independent States. It also believes in the necessity of cooperation with other regions.

In that connection, I would like to mention the timeliness and importance of President A. Akayev's doctrine of "Silk Road Diplomacy". A revival of the idea of the great Silk Road presupposes the transformation of the area along the road into a zone of stability, security, cooperation and equitable partnership. The idea of reviving this road also represents a commitment to creating favourable conditions for increased international cooperation so that we can take joint action to solve the global problems that confront mankind at the threshold of the third millennium.

The national strategy of the Kyrgyz Republic highlights sustainable development as the basis for stable and secure human development as we enter the new millennium. The implementation of the decisions adopted at the World Summit for Social Development are of immense importance for the Kyrgyz Republic. For countries with economies in transition — countries seeking to find their way to sustainable growth — it is especially important that there be coordination and joint action within a revitalized United Nations, the Bretton Woods institutions and regional organizations in order to accelerate the integration of these countries into the world economy.

A priority for Kyrgyz development is solving the three-headed problem of modern times: how to promote the economy, ecology and social development. I should point out that ecology is the cornerstore of sustainable development for Kyrgyzstan. The harmony of man and nature is at the heart of the sustainable development programme adopted by the Government of Kyrgyzstan last year.

Kyrgyzstan is a mountainous country; most of its territory — 95 per cent — is covered by mountains. Mountains, as is well known, are an important source of fresh water, biological diversity, mineral resources and energy, as well as being extremely important for tourism. At the same time, however, mountains means surprises and dangers. Earthquakes, landslides, avalanches, floods — all threaten human lives and require enormous financial and material expenditures. In that connection, Kyrgyzstan is deeply grateful to United Nations Member States for their support of its initiative to declare the year 2002 an international year of mountains, and we request them to continue to support the initiative at this session of the Assembly.

The Kyrgyz Republic's policy of peace, which is focused on the new trend towards a multipolar global system, presupposes, *inter alia*, a safe, non-nuclear future. The specific steps Kyrgyzstan has taken in the area of nuclear disarmament and in strengthening the nuclear non-proliferation regime confirm its commitment to this policy.

Appropriately, the Central Asian countries' initiative to create a nuclear-weapon-free zone was on the agenda of the fifty-second session of the General Assembly. During that session a resolution on the establishment of such a zone in Central Asia was adopted by consensus.

Today it is a pleasure for me to state that the consultative meeting of experts of Central Asian countries, nuclear-weapon States and the United Nations, which took place on 9 and 10 July in Bishkek, laid the legal foundation for the Central Asian initiative. This is a new stage in the creation of the zone. In this connection, we believe it useful to continue regular meetings between experts of the regional working group and those of the nuclear-weapon States, with the participation of representatives of the United Nations and the International Atomic Energy Agency.

This year's session coincides with the fiftieth anniversary of United Nations peacekeeping operations. Kyrgyzstan completely supports the peacekeeping efforts the Organization has undertaken in various global hot spots. At the same time, we believe that, along with peacekeeping operations, more attention should be paid to the early prevention of conflicts — so-called preventive or quiet diplomacy aimed at preventing disputes from turning into conflicts.

Kyrgyzstan is seriously concerned by the armed conflict that has lasted for almost two decades in Afghanistan. We are also seriously alarmed at the military confrontation and the grave humanitarian situation in Kosovo, the situation in Africa and the absence of progress in the Middle East, Cyprus and the Korean peninsula.

However, we are equally concerned about the financial crises in South-East Asia, Russia and Latin America and the nuclear- weapons tests conducted by India and Pakistan. For, as history shows, the sources of conflict, despite being very different, are at the same

time very similar. Armed conflicts are accompanied by violence, mass exodus of refugees, illegal trafficking in drugs and weapons and flagrant disregard for and violations of human rights. The territory of countries experiencing armed conflicts is often utilized to train professional mercenaries and terrorists.

Terrorism long ago crossed national borders and became international in nature. Thousands of innocent people have become its victims, including children, women and elderly people. Particular phenomena of the past century have been terrorist bombings and nuclear terrorism. We support the proposals for accelerating work on a draft convention to combat acts of nuclear terrorism. Kyrgyzstan firmly opposes any form or type of terrorism and calls on the international community to pool its efforts against this global threat.

Kyrgyzstan's six years as a Member of the United Nations have been a good training ground for participation in the United Nations family. Together with other countries, we have striven to establish a world of greater justice, to achieve social progress in the interest of humankind and to assert human dignity and equal rights for all.

As the twenty-first century draws closer, what the world becomes will depend primarily on our joint efforts — the efforts of all United Nations Member States.

The Acting President: I now call on the Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, His Excellency Mr. Choe Su Hon.

Mr. Choe Su Hon (Democratic People's Republic of Korea) (*spoke in Korean; English text furnished by the delegation*): Allow me first of all, on behalf of the delegation of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, to congratulate Mr. Didier Opertti, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Uruguay, on his election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its current session. We believe that his rich experience and diplomatic skill in dealing with international affairs will lead this session to fruitful results. We also express our gratitude to the former President, Mr. Hennadiy Udovenko, for his successful stewardship of the fifty-second session of the General Assembly. At the same time, I wish to take this opportunity to express our appreciation to Secretary-General Kofi Annan for his efforts devoted to the maintenance of international peace and security.

It is the wish and aspiration of humankind to make the forthcoming twenty-first century peaceful and prosperous. In this connection, we believe that working out appropriate ways and means to achieve that end should be the main focus of the current session.

The next century should be one of independence. In order to build a world free of all forms of domination and subordination and to ensure equality among all countries and nations, independence should be realized throughout the world. Only when all Member States adhere to the *Juche* character and the national character and firmly maintain independence in all fields of State activities can international peace and security also be ensured.

At the first session of the tenth Supreme People's Assembly of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, held on 5 September this year, our people unanimously re-elected with high esteem the Great Leader Comrade Kim Jong Il as Chairman of the National Defence Committee. The chairmanship of the National Defence Committee is the highest post of the State, organizing and leading the work of defending the country and the destiny of the people, as well as strengthening and increasing the defence capabilities of the country and State power as a whole through command over all its political, military and economic forces. It is a sacred and important post that symbolizes and represents the honour of the country and the dignity of the nation.

The election of our Great Leader General Kim Jong Il as Chairman of the National Defence Committee is the most significant event in the sacred cause of strengthening and developing our Republic and in achieving prosperity and happiness for all generations to come. It is a vivid expression of our people's absolute trust in, support for and boundless loyalty to their leader.

Some time ago, our people enthusiastically celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. What pleased our people most at this emotional juncture was the fact that our scientists and technicians successfully launched into orbit an artificial satellite, Kwangmyongsong No. 1, using a multi-stage rocket carrier developed by us in our own way, with our own knowledge and 100 per cent our own technology. It was the first of its kind in the country. The successful launching of our first artificial satellite was an historic event demonstrating the might of our scientific and technical development, and it will make a great contribution to safeguarding world peace and

enriching the store of science and technology for humankind.

In the last 50 years, the Government of our Republic has been able to safeguard the sovereignty of our country, advance the socialism chosen by our people towards victory and defend peace on the Korean peninsula by holding fast to the *Juche* character and the national character, while firmly maintaining independence in all fields of State activities.

Throughout the country our entire population is now fully determined to glorify our socialism, which is centred on the popular masses, under the banner of the Republic founded by our Great Leader Comrade Kim Il Sung, the founding father of socialist Korea. The people uphold the leadership of the respected and beloved General Kim Jong Il. In the near future, the world will see the independent and peace-loving Democratic People's Republic of Korea develop into a prosperous Power.

The reunification of Korea and peace and security on the Korean peninsula have long been a main area of concern for the international community. From the viewpoint of both the misfortune and suffering of a nation and the peace and security of a region, the division of the Korean peninsula should not last any longer. Due to the fact that Korea has not yet been reunified, military confrontation and tensions grow increasingly aggravated between the United States, Japan and South Korea, on the one hand, and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea on the other.

As a result of the present military manoeuvres against the Democratic People's Republic of Korea on and around the Korean peninsula, there is a growing danger that either the twentieth century may close or the twenty-first century may open with another Korean war. This danger should be removed by all possible means. In order to remove the danger of war and ensure a durable peace on the Korean peninsula, the reunification of the country should be achieved without fail.

Independence, peaceful reunification and great national unity are the three principles of national reunification agreed upon between the North and the South. These principles were also welcomed and supported by the United Nations. The Government of our Republic consistently maintains that Korea should be reunified by means of confederacy on the basis of the three principles of reunification. In April this year, our Great Leader, Comrade Kim Jong Il, advanced the five-point policy for the great unity of the entire nation as part of his continued efforts for national reunification.

The main elements of the five-point policy are the principle of national independence; a change in policy by the South Korean authorities towards reconciliation and alliance with the North; dialogue for the unity and reunification of the whole nation; the promotion of coexistence, co-prosperity and public interests between the North and the South; and solidarity and coalition between the North, South and the international community. The Government of our Republic will spare no effort to achieve these points.

We have been consistently in favour of dialogue for reunification and to improve relations between the North and South of Korea. The North-South dialogue should be conducted on the basis of the principles of placing the common interests of the nation above all, removing distrust and confrontation between the North and the South and subordinating everything to the cause of national reunification. No one should be allowed to use dialogue for dishonest political purposes or to perpetuate the division of the country. If the South Korean authorities show their sincere desire for reunification by taking practical actions — such as abolishing the National Security Law and the like — we will meet with them at any time and hold dialogues and consultations to discuss the common destiny of the nation and work together for national reunification.

In order for the Korean people to resolve the questions of national unity and reunification by themselves, concerned countries, including the United States and Japan, should refrain from hindering the efforts of the Korean people. The United States Army is the main military entity in South Korea and has long been in belligerent relations with us. This is a quite abnormal phenomenon in today's post-cold-war international relations and the product of anachronistic thinking. It is the United States military entity and no other that constitutes the major obstacle in the way of the independent and peaceful reunification of Korea. In this forum, we once again strongly urge the United States to withdraw its forces from South Korea and to end its belligerent relations with us. The States Members of the United Nations should no longer claim to be unaware that the name and flag of the United Nations continue to be abused to conceal these belligerent relations.

We are convinced that the most appropriate way of maintaining peace on the Korean peninsula is to dissolve

the United Nations command in South Korea and to conclude a peace agreement between the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the United States. This is our unchanging position.

Japan should not hinder the cause of our reunification by aggravating the tense situation on the Korean peninsula. Japan must discharge its responsibility for the Korean question by sincerely apologizing and providing compensation for its enormous crimes against our people, instead of attempting to declare war against us by drawing up so-called "emergency legislation", aimed at keeping pace militarily with the United States, the belligerent party with us.

Recently, too, the Japanese authorities behaved unreasonably when they publicly questioned our satellite launch and acted rashly in taking the issue to the Security Council, insisting that it respond to our launch. This was a flagrant mockery of the international community. If our satellite launch is a serious security concern, Japan's satellite launches should be top priority for the Security Council's consideration.

With just one year to go before the twenty-first century, the United Nations is faced with the task of building a new world free from all forms of domination and subordination. New challenges in safeguarding world peace and security, achieving the denuclearization of the world and ensuring social progress and economic development require the United Nations to find appropriate new measures.

Almost all the recent attempts by a few big countries, as opposed to the United Nations membership as a whole, to deal with international matters have met with failure. This proves that the era of power politics and big-Power arbitrary action ended with the cold war. The United Nations is now at a crossroads. It can either be dictated to by big countries or become the Organization of a new era in which the purposes and principles of its Charter are safeguarded and fully realized. The reform of the United Nations should correctly reflect this reality.

At present, the most undemocratic organ in the United Nations system is the Security Council. The current composition of the Council does not represent the general United Nations membership and the veto power of its permanent members often subverts the wishes of the majority of member States.

If the United Nations is to be democratized, the Security Council should be reformed. To this end, the expansion of the non-permanent category should be given precedence, thus correcting, to a certain extent, the current imbalance in the Council's composition. Its working methods must be improved for the sake of transparency. Priority should be given to the developing countries in the expansion of the Council's permanent membership. Any State that has failed to atone for its past is not eligible for permanent membership. As for relations between the General Assembly and the Security Council, the authority of the General Assembly should be enhanced decisively.

Recent events in southern Asia, witnessed by the entire world, remind us all that disarmament, especially nuclear disarmament, should remain a priority on the agenda of the United Nations. Although several years have elapsed since the end of the cold war, nuclear stockpiles around the world have become more sophisticated rather than being reduced. When the international community called for a ban on all nuclear explosive tests, the nuclear-weapon States opted for subcritical tests.

The proliferation of nuclear weapons cannot be prevented so long as the nuclear-weapon States pursue a monopoly of nuclear weapons. The policy of the nuclear-weapon States to provide a nuclear umbrella and their double standards in dealing with nuclear issues are among the obstacles to making nuclear disarmament a reality.

The United Nations should decisively strengthen its role in the field of disarmament. In this regard, we believe that there is a growing need to convene a fourth special session of the General Assembly on disarmament.

The issue of human rights needs to be dealt with objectively and impartially within the framework of the United Nations. In today's international relations, the human rights issue has became synonymous with intervention in the internal affairs of other countries. Attempts to impose the values of one nation upon others are rampant. Consequently, the rights of people to choose and the sovereign rights of nations are being infringed. The United Nations should reject the politicization of human rights and never tolerate double standards in the implementation of human rights instruments.

The twenty-first century should be devoted to development and cooperation. Economic development and the sustained growth of the developing countries should

become a main theme in international economic relations. To this end, the current inequitable international economic relations need to be redressed and the external debt issue resolved.

Economic sanctions run counter to the ideal of cooperation, are anachronistic, and only incite confrontation among nations. Countries that see economic sanctions as an instrument of power and authority should pay due attention to the fact that many people, at home and abroad, are increasingly sceptical about and opposed to them.

Globalization has caused the monetary crisis in Asia, increasing the poverty and marginalization of the developing countries. The United Nations should find ways to meet this new challenge. It should play its rightful role in strongly promoting the spirit of collective self-reliance of the developing countries and urging the implementation of official development assistance by the developed countries.

The delegation of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea appreciates the efforts of the countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America to develop regional and subregional cooperation in the spirit of collective self-reliance. We also support Syria and other Arab countries in their just struggle to seek a fair and comprehensive solution to the Middle East problem and appreciate the efforts of the countries of Africa to promote peace, security and development there.

I take this opportunity to express our gratitude to the Governments, organizations and individuals of various countries, as well as the United Nations and governmental and non-governmental international organizations, for their humanitarian assistance with the damage caused by several consecutive years of natural disaster in my country.

The Democratic People's Republic of Korea is an independent peace-loving State and its Government consistently adheres to the fundamental ideal of independence, peace and friendship in its foreign policy. The Government of our Republic will develop relations of friendship and cooperation with all countries respecting its sovereignty and continue to make every effort to ensure peace on the Korean peninsula and to safeguard peace and security in North-East Asia, in conformity with the purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter.

My delegation will contribute to the best of its ability to the successful deliberation of all items on the agenda of the current session.

The Acting President: The last speaker on my list is His Excellency Mr. Mate Granić, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Croatia.

Mr. Granić (Croatia): Let me first extend my sincere congratulations to the new President of the General Assembly at its fifty-third session, His Excellency Mr. Didier Opertti, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Uruguay. I am confident that his diplomatic experience will play an important role in the work of the Assembly. At the same time, I would like to thank Mr. Hennadiy Y. Udovenko of Ukraine for the skilful manner in which he presided over the work of the fifty-second session of the General Assembly.

I welcome the opportunity to address the General Assembly on behalf of a nation that has emerged more vital than ever before from one of the worst regional crises since the Second World War. The free and sovereign Croatia of today harbours a vibrant market place of ideas, innovative economic and rich social and cultural practices. We are learning that democracy means the right to both rational and what at times might appear irrational choices. We are learning that the free-market economy is both a prospect for success and a risk of failure.

Positive results are already visible. Croatia of today, although still burdened by the multiple tasks of transition, reconstruction, the return of refugees and displaced persons and reconciliation, stands firmly rooted in the maturing Central European polity and economy. Croatia looks with ambition and sharpened senses towards reclaiming its place in the old Europe and contributing to the new Europe and the global community.

Since ancient times Croatia has been a European country. Integration into Euro-Atlantic institutions remains our strategic goal. Therefore, Croatia will continue to march towards it, being devoted to its high standards and committed to its principles. This year Croatia is presiding over the Central European initiative with a great sense of responsibility. Furthermore, Croatia hopes to join the World Trade Organization soon.

As a Central European and Mediterranean country, Croatia will further endeavour to remain a key agent of stability and peace in this part of the world. Through its

responsible policy towards the crisis which has marked the recent history of this part of Europe, Croatia has affirmed its indispensable role in the most important political developments in this region.

Even though the war is behind us, Croatia is still grappling with the legacies of aggression, such as the problems of devastated economic infrastructure, missing persons, ongoing assistance to war victims and invalids and the return of displaced persons and refugees. This means that my country is undergoing a double transition at the same time. The transition from war to peace is equally complex and demanding.

In June this year, the national Programme for the Return and Accommodation of Displaced Persons, Refugees and Exiled Persons was adopted, and, as everybody agrees, it is being successfully implemented. So far, more than 45,000 Croatian Serbs have returned. Croatian authorities are also taking numerous steps and measures to encourage the process of reconciliation. A successful donors' conference on reconstruction, to be held later this fall, should further contribute to the ongoing process of return and normalization of daily life, especially in the war-affected areas.

Croatia is increasingly focusing on post-war reconstruction, economic growth and development, as well as on the overall normalization of relations with its neighbours to the east and south. But it must be stressed that full normalization of relations with neighbouring countries has always been a cornerstone of our policies from the very outset.

Croatia was not only the first country to recognize Bosnia and Herzegovina as an independent and sovereign country, but it has also helped Bosnia and Herzegovina more than any other party in its struggle to survive within its internationally recognized borders. Hence, let me repeat that for the Republic of Croatia as a guarantor of the Dayton Peace Agreement, the following basic principles remain paramount: first, Bosnia and Herzegovina as a single, internationally recognized State; second, the decentralization of State apparatus; and third, full equality of the three constituent peoples. Croatia cannot support any solution for Bosnia and Herzegovina that does not fully incorporate these founding principles or that in any way amounts to a revision of the Dayton principles. Deviations from or tacit abrogation of these principles can be both damaging and destabilizing not only to Bosnia and Herzegovina itself, but also to the other countries in the region.

Croatia firmly believes that the recent elections in Bosnia and Herzegovina will further contribute to lasting stability and security. The agreement on free transit through the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina at Neum and use of the Croatian port of Ploce, which will be formally signed shortly, is yet another example of good-neighbourly relations between Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Croatia has signed an agreement on the State to State Council on Cooperation with Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Croatia supports the efforts by the Office of the High Representative, United Nations representatives and the peacekeeping forces in Bosnia and Herzegovina and shall spare no effort in doing what is in its power to help them fulfil their mandate.

We have come a long way in our bilateral relations with our eastern neighbour, the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Since the end of hostilities, 10 bilateral agreements have been signed. We hope that the last outstanding issue, concerning the security arrangement for the Prevlaka area, will be negotiated promptly. Negotiations formally began on 15 September 1998. Croatia stands ready not only to open the border crossings with the Republic of Montenegro, but also to continue with demilitarization on our side of the border and with the present security regime currently administered by United Nations Mission of Observers in Prevlaka (UNMOP). Whether it is through successful bilateral negotiations with the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, through the Security Council or even through unilateral action consistent with the rights and duties of Croatia under international law, the UNMOP mandate should terminate by 15 January 1999, because in the present circumstances another prolongation of the mandate can be misused to stall negotiations indefinitely.

The other United Nations mission in the Republic of Croatia, the United Nations Civilian Police (UNCIVPOL), with a mandate in the Croatian Danubian region, is approaching its final stage, after having successfully completed its task in that part of Croatia and, together with recently adopted measures by the Croatian Government, having helped create conditions for reconciliation and a comprehensive return process.

Termination of both United Nations missions will be a new landmark in the life of our country and will confirm once again its sovereignty and integrity over its entire territory.

While it has lent its full support and cooperation to the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, Croatia is not satisfied with its results thus far. Indictments issued so far do not adequately reflect the scope of war crimes committed by different sides in the conflict nor the level of involvement. The Republic of Croatia helped to persuade 11 Bosnian Croats to voluntarily surrender to The Hague Tribunal. Three of them have been acquitted while the rest have been awaiting trial for over 12 months, much longer than usual in any individual State. On top of that, not a single person — despite promises made as far back as the Dayton negotiations — has been charged for crimes committed against Bosnian Croats. Furthermore, only one Serb was brought to The Hague for crimes committed during the aggression against Croatia, but he died in prison and was never sentenced.

The most notorious perpetrators of war crimes and crimes against humanity — Karadzic, Mladic and Martic — still remain at large, and in many cases in full view of the international community.

The Republic of Croatia shares the concern of the international community on the rapidly worsening situation in Kosovo and the impending threat to international peace and security. As a neighbouring country of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, Croatia is vitally interested in a speedy resolution of the crisis. We join the international community in condemning violations of human rights in Kosovo, and we denounce all forms of terrorism, regardless of whether they are committed by a State, a group or an individual, bearing in mind that State terrorism represents the most dangerous form of terrorism, due to the resources available to States. Croatia supports a peaceful and negotiated solution that would respect both the territorial integrity of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and the rights of Kosovo Albanians to autonomy. Croatia is alarmed at the imminent humanitarian catastrophe, which needs urgent and determined international action.

The twentieth century can boast of tremendous achievements in various fields on the individual as well as the collective level, while awareness of global interdependence in every respect is growing.

However, we must face the fact that we are also witnesses to the negative legacies of the twentieth century: the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction; terrorism; narcotics production, trafficking and consumption; lagging development; disregard for the environment; the rise of transnational crime; and continued grave breaches of fundamental human rights and humanitarian law.

On the fiftieth anniversary of United Nations peacekeeping and the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, let us ask ourselves: what is the United Nations, what does it really do? I agree with those who strongly believe that the United Nations is not only a global Organization in which Governments exchange views, muster support for their policies and views or trade in votes and influence. The United Nations is much more than an Organization; it is a living idea for a better world.

Values do matter.

Like all organizations, the United Nations has aged, and its structure and mechanisms have become anywhere from slightly to grossly obsolete. To meet the challenges and needs of the emerging global society at the turn of the century, the United Nations must evolve just as quickly or risk being overtaken by other institutions or initiatives that may or may not be universal in scope, and may or may not more faithfully reflect the credo of a better world for all of us. It is high time that we again acted as "We the peoples".

It is Croatia's view that the reform of the United Nations should take many forms and focus not only on the needs of the Organization — that is, on the fulfilment of its legislative mandates — but also on increasing its effectiveness on the global stage. The Secretary-General has done his part, and it is now up to each and every one of us — as nations, as peoples, as individuals — to partake in reforming the United Nations for the next millennium.

The reform of the Security Council remains imperative. While the founding principle of the sovereign equality of States must be strictly maintained, both the structure and operation of the Security Council must be harmonized with the new realities in international affairs. Interdependence, liberalization of polities and markets and the profoundly widened access to instantaneous communication all demand that the function and use of the veto power be readjusted, and that this pivotal world body operate in a more transparent, representative and otherwise democratic structure. Croatia thus supports the enlargement of the Security Council in both categories, permanent and non-permanent, fully in line with its repeatedly declared positions.

Several important world conferences have been held under United Nations auspices in the past decade; the time has come to implement the findings and evaluate the results of those conferences.

We firmly believe that the role of the Economic and Social Council remains important to the well-being of this Organization and its Members. Although Croatia has increased its presence in United Nations expert bodies, including two commissions of the Economic and Social Council, we can do and wish to do more. Hence, Croatia attaches paramount importance to its candidature for the Economic and Social Council for the years 2000-2002.

The need for further improvement of international security structures and mechanisms deserves our special attention. If it has been identified with anything, the United Nations has been widely identified with its peacekeeping role. Nowadays, as we approach the end of the active and, by general estimation, highly successful United Nations peacekeeping presence in Croatia, the Croatian Government and people feel very strongly that the time has come for Croatia to pay back in kind some of the good deeds bestowed on us by the United Nations community. It was with a sense of pride and responsibility that I submitted a letter to the Secretary-General earlier today, formally notifying him of Croatia's readiness to join the ranks of peacekeeping contributor countries.

Disarmament and international security issues are critically important in our efforts to preserve peace and enhance stability in the increasingly volatile world.

Croatia is particularly concerned about the problem of landmines. We still suffer from the consequences of more than 2 million mines scattered all over our country during the imposed war. A lot of work has been done to alleviate the problem, but many areas have not yet been cleared. This situation adversely affects the process of return of displaced people and refugees and slows down economic reconstruction and development. The sheer magnitude of this problem requires a more forceful and resourceful global response, be it financial or technical. Croatia ratified the Ottawa Convention in May 1998 and strongly supports the efforts in the Conference on Disarmament to start negotiations on a global ban by building on the achievements of the Ottawa process.

The developments in disarmament, non-proliferation and international security since our last session can be a cause of great concern. International terrorism is another threat to security and peace in the world. Croatia joins others in unequivocally condemning all forms of terrorism, regardless of their motives or origin. Croatia also supports the strengthening of international cooperation in order to bring those responsible to justice and prevent further abhorrent acts of violence. My Government has ratified all major anti-terrorist treaties and actively participates in the current work on a nuclear terrorism convention.

Croatia joins the rest of the world in commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In the past 50 years it has become obvious that we should all work hard to establish efficient mechanisms for the protection of human rights. More objective criteria must be developed for their evaluation in order to avoid politicization and establish a universal standard in human rights.

In November 1997, Croatia ratified the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, and accepted the competence of the European Court of Human Rights and the European Commission of Human Rights to deal with individual cases. Croatia has also ratified the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities and the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages.

Croatia welcomes the results of the Rome Conference on the establishment of an International Criminal Court, and thanks the host country, Italy, for its generous hospitality. Although not all aspirations could be fully accommodated in Rome, the establishment of an efficient, permanent International Criminal Court will be a milestone in the march towards the universal protection of human rights and the rule of law. Croatia intends to sign and ratify the Statute of the court in the near future and calls on other States to do the same.

The role of the United Nations remains of vital importance for the world today. Under its auspices, many praiseworthy achievements have been made in various fields. The United Nations has played an important role in Croatia, in time of war as well as now, when its two missions are about to complete their mandates. The United Nations presence in Croatia will continue at a level of partnership in addressing social and, especially, development questions. Only a strong and reformed Organization will be able to adequately meet the increasing and changing needs of its Member States.

In conclusion, therefore,I would like to say again that values do matter. We the peoples are capable of truly reforming the United Nations. We both need and deserve a United Nations that is able and equipped to meet the challenges and opportunities of the twenty-first century.

The meeting rose at 7.35 p.m.

United Nations A/53/PV.19

General Assembly

Fifty-third Session

Official Records

19th plenary meeting
Tuesday, 29 September 1998, 10 a.m.
New York

President: Mr. Opertti ..... (Uruguay)

The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Agenda item 9 (*continued*)

General debate

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): The Assembly will first hear an address by His Excellency the Honourable Guido de Marco, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Malta, and former President of the General Assembly.

Mr. de Marco (Malta): I join other delegations in congratulating you, Sir, on your election as President of the General Assembly. We are confident that your ability and experience will successfully guide our work during this session. I also wish to express our gratitude to your predecessor, His Excellency Mr. Hennadiy Udovenko, whose presidency was characterized by energy and drive.

Freedom first and foremost. That rallying cry has inspired peoples and nations throughout this century. It gave birth to brave acts of courage during two world conflicts. It gave sustenance in the struggle for decolonization. It gave stamina and resilience during and after the dark days of the cold war.

Freedom first and foremost. That was the solid platform on which citizens worldwide stood their ground whenever authoritarian regimes sought to erode democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

Freedom first and foremost. That ideal buttressed President Roosevelt in his effort to give birth to the United Nations.

As we strive to build a better world and struggle to conquer the uncertainties of our times, we the peoples of the United Nations continue to cherish those four essential human freedoms identified by President Roosevelt in his speech to Congress on 6 January 1941: freedom of speech and expression — everywhere in the world; freedom of every person to worship God in his own way — everywhere in the world; freedom from want to secure for every nation a healthy peacetime life for its inhabitants — everywhere in the world; freedom from fear through a worldwide reduction of armaments so that no nation will be in a position to commit an act of physical aggression against any neighbour — anywhere in the world.

Underlining these four freedoms, President Roosevelt stressed that they were "a definite basis for a kind of world attainable in our own time and generation", not a "vision of a distant millennium".

For the past 53 sessions world leaders have gathered here in this General Assembly to take stock of humankind's progress in achieving those noble aims for which the United Nations was founded. Each year brings with it new unknowns, new challenges, new tragedies. Yet each year we also see movement, in small steps or in strides, towards a more secure world.

98-85912 (E)

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Building a world where peace, justice and freedom reign supreme is a duty for all of us who serve in public office. This responsibility becomes more onerous as we advance towards the dawning of the new millennium.

Eight years ago I was privileged to serve this Assembly as its President. The future then beckoned. In 1989 the world had witnessed the collapse of the Soviet bloc. Millions had reacquired their freedom. In 1990 the idyllic aftermath of the Bush-Gorbachev Malta summit was shattered by the invasion of Kuwait. In those times of euphoric uncertainty I called on Member States to revitalize this General Assembly and ensure a symbiotic relationship between the Organization's principal organs. The call for reform prevailed. It bore fruit and continues to give results.

Reform is essential for the Organization's well-being. It is even more essential for the future of humankind.

Eight years ago I signalled the danger of a curtain of poverty dividing the world, with the same dire consequences as the Iron Curtain had on world peace and security. That danger remains and has become more pronounced.

Last week the President of the United States reminded this Assembly that "the gulf is widening between the world's haves and have-nots". (*A/53/PV.7, p. 11*) Narrowing that gulf is essential if we desire a secure global society bereft of rage. That rage often transforms itself into acts of violence.

The ill winds that blow at present, devastating the economies of many States and crippling progress built through the hard work of so any families around the world, further aggravate this situation.

The United Nations is the unique instrument to promote and protect the universal enjoyment of human dignity. Significantly, one of the first tasks that this Organization set itself was the drafting of a Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of its adoption by this Assembly, we renew our commitment to its content. That document is not outdated, nor can it be easily replaced. It proclaims human rights that by their very nature are universal, inherent and indivisible.

The Declaration is comprehensive and demands an observance that is equally comprehensive. A selective approach damages the Declaration and the wider concepts that it represents. It undermines a vision of society in which respect for human rights is paramount and universal.

There is, however, a significant lack in this Declaration. It is an instrument with no judicial mechanisms or sanctions. Has the time arrived to learn from the experience of the regional human rights conventions, in particular the European Convention, which through its mechanisms instituted the European Court of Human Rights and through the right of individual petition further guarantees a judicial process aimed at ensuring effective enforcement?

There can be no freedom without democracy. Equally, there can be no democracy without the exercise of individual freedoms. We underscore this reaffirmation as we commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

We the peoples look up to United Nations for leadership in resolving the ills of our times. Yet we the peoples are the United Nations. The United Nations is us.

Attempts to project or depict the United Nations as an entity alien to the rest of the international community or as an Organization that can determine or predetermine the fate of peoples and society are both erroneous and dangerous. This Organization depends on a continuation of that balance of principles and institutions intrinsic in the Charter. This balance is best conserved by consolidating the process of consensus-building that has rendered so many positive results in the past half-century. Imposition of the will of some over the will of the others is rarely conducive to harmony in any circumstance. It is even less so in a forum of sovereign nation States.

There are instances when the will of the majority traces important paths for future cooperation between States. Yet the effort to ensure the widest a priori adherence to the principles being negotiated is always essential, particularly if we desire such agreements to be universal in their application. This demands a diplomatic and political effort that may appear exasperating. Still, it is the path that best conserves the delicate balance between the sovereign rights of States and the emergence of a new world order.

We have partaken of the sorrow sown by violence and war. We have survived the tensions of bloc antagonism and nuclear proliferation. We have grappled with the anguish of division and mutual suspicion. The

imminence of a new millennium naturally generates hopes and expectations. Foremost is the longing for the fulfilment of the promise garnered at the end of the cold war. Throughout this decade we committed ourselves, devising tools to deal with uncertainties as they emerged. Yet suffering and strife continue to plague the planet.

Shocking violations imposed upon us the duty to provide future generations with an international judicial mechanism to fairly establish the guilt of the perpetrators of war crimes and provide for their punishment. We acted with the swiftness demanded by the might of right. We set the framework to deal with crimes that are an affront to humanity's sense of justice and compassion.

In Rome last July we adopted the Statute of the International Criminal Court. We thus lay the foundation for an effective and credible institution that in itself is a deterrent against the commission of heinous crimes falling under its jurisdiction. We hope that the momentum gathered in institution-building is retained to enable the Court to start functioning and effectively deal with crimes against humanity whenever they occur.

Vigilance remains the order of the day. With good reason, the world proclaimed victory at the indefinite extension of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) and the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT). The ratification of the latter by two of the nuclear-weapon States is a welcome and positive step. Yet pitted against these positive developments were recent nuclear tests carried out by two non-signatories. We have seen the partial dismantling of nuclear arsenals, but also witnessed the dangers of proliferation. Such actions fuel insecurity and mistrust. We join others in strongly urging these two countries, and indeed all countries, to exercise restraint. Nuclear testing is a stark reminder of the dangers ever present in nuclear weaponry.

Malta welcomes the statements of intent made by the Prime Ministers of India and Pakistan in this Assembly last week. They augur well for the universality of the NPT regime. No effort must be spared to ensure universal adherence to and compliance with the relevant treaties covering not only nuclear weapons but also all weapons of mass destruction. The nuclear disarmament agenda must be kept on track. The dangers that loom are not limited to the possession and use of such armaments by nuclear-weapon States. The spectre of nuclear terrorism haunts us as we combat illegal trafficking related to the possession, production and use of such weapons.

The dangers remain multiple. Chemical and biological weapons pose destabilizing threats. By disturbing contrast, technologies for their acquisition and use are relatively easy to develop. Conventional arms-trafficking also remains a major menace.

The establishment of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) sets out a regime of control and verification that strikes a balance, curbing proliferation of chemicals for weapons use while sanctioning beneficial use of chemicals by a wide range of industries. Malta is proud to have served on the Executive Council in its initial stage.

It is our hope that the verification protocol on biological weapons may likewise hamper, discourage and disallow the use of biological components for war, conflict or conquest. Images of the maimed victims of landmines buttress our commitment to outlaw these weapons. Malta was among the first to sign the Ottawa Convention, and ratification is being processed. We join others in saluting its entry into force early next year. This brings closer the prohibition on the use, stockpiling, production and transfer of anti-personnel mines and their destruction.

Equally threatening, intrusive and destabilizing are international crime, drug-trafficking and terrorism. These continue to poison the very roots of our societies, spreading corruption, fear and suffering. No Government can ignore or shield itself from such phenomena. Complacency is both dangerous and unreal. United Nations efforts to further international cooperation to combat and curb these afflictions, particularly those of the Vienna Centre for International Crime Prevention, deserve our full and unwavering support.

Freedom, democracy and social justice have fortunately become oft-used terms within this Organization. They are indeed the basic elements of all our efforts. They reflect the will to give substance to the Charter's reaffirmation of fundamental human rights, the dignity and worth of the human person, and the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small.

Commitment to human rights must be matched by action to promote social justice and better living standards in larger freedom. The human rights that we promote and protect must be complemented by the provision of a social safety net that preserves the dignity of all. This is a principle that the Maltese people hold dear.

My Government was again returned to office less than three weeks ago. The cornerstone of our agenda is the restoration of confidence and direction and the generation of wealth, to the benefit of all our people: our only and most precious resource. This demands the resumption of a strategy that invests in improving health and education services with the same vigour with which we revolutionized the social and economic infrastructures of our country. We are committed to social justice and thus to the well-being of those most vulnerable to suffering if left to their own devices in times of economic transition. The true measure of progress remains social justice that buttresses equity and personal dignity and ensures the universal enjoyment of fundamental human rights and freedoms.

The change in Administration has also brought about the resumption of the march towards Europe which was briefly frozen during the previous 22 months by the previous Administration. Malta's application for membership of the European Union has been reactivated. An overwhelming electoral mandate reconfirms the European vocation of our people, repeatedly expressed in free and fair elections during the past two decades. The choice of our people is clear, and the path we shall follow is equally clear. Our immediate objective is to rejoin those countries earmarked for the next enlargement of the Union. Though much remains to be done, the commitment of the people and the Government is deep-seated.

We do not choose to be European. We are European: European in history and culture, in economic structures and political organization, in security concerns and ethical values. Anchorage in the European Union is the natural culmination of our development process, our traditions and our culture. As in any other member of the Union, debate on the benefits of membership and the consequent rights and responsibilities continues. This is an intrinsic aspect of the democratic process. Nowhere in Europe have choices been easy or straightforward, but everywhere in Europe, the freely expressed will of the people has prevailed. This is a fundamental characteristic of Europe, a political union built on respect for the individual and the democratic will of its peoples.

Enlargement of the European Union to gather peoples and nations within its fold in a spirit of pluralism, solidarity and cooperation is more than just a process. It cannot be seen as just an exercise in augmenting the membership. It is much more than that. It is a political demand for the realization of the Union and its credibility in global politics. Characterized by reciprocity, it is a quest in peace-building, a venture that in less than half a century has continued to transform the founding fathers' ideal into a tangible reality.

Like all other Mediterranean States, Malta views the problems of its region with particular concern. At the crossroads of cultures and civilizations, the Mediterranean is disproportionately burdened with turmoil, tension and conflict. Resolution of each crisis demands positive action by the protagonists directly responsible. Yet the world community can contribute, through its efforts and good offices, to constructing an environment conducive to negotiated settlement. The bitter heritage of the past sometimes impedes that contact which is an essential first step in the setting up of negotiating structures. In this effort to overcome obstacles, the international community and individual statesmen have given their fair share.

The open wounds that still afflict the region demand renewed engagement lest they continue to fester and degenerate into volatility that would risk spilling over to broader areas.

The Cyprus question has long been one of these open wounds, having political and stability repercussions that go beyond the geographic dimensions of the island itself. A solution in conformity with the resolutions of the United Nations can have enduring positive effects for all the parties concerned in the dispute.

The ever pervasive problems encountered by the Middle East process are of particular concern. In spite of various efforts, this process has come to a virtual standstill. We believe in the importance of revitalizing and respecting the commitments undertaken through and after the Oslo peace accords. We urge all sides to respond positively to current initiatives aimed at restoring dialogue and hope.

The new millennium is the commemoration of the birth of Jesus Christ, when the message that was brought to us was "peace on Earth". This is precisely the message that is central to the initiative that will be debated during this session, Bethlehem 2000. How sad it will be if the land of the nativity is still at war 2,000 years after that message.

The Euro-Mediterranean process was a significant step in bringing together European and Mediterranean countries comprehensively to address issues that still beleaguer the region. The impasse in the Middle East has dealt a blow to the Euro-Mediterranean process. One

hopes that this is but a temporary setback. Stability in the Mediterranean must rest on multiple initiatives that nurture cooperation through gradual confidence- and security-building measures. This is the crux of our insistence on the need to establish a stability pact for the region. Initiatives such as the addition of a parliamentary dimension to this process of dialogue, promoted by the Inter-Parliamentary Union, the setting up of a council or forum of Mediterranean States and the eventual creation of a conference on security and cooperation in the Mediterranean deserve serious consideration.

Regional approaches complement and reinforce efforts at the international level. In 1992, at the Helsinki follow-up meeting of the then Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), Malta proposed that the CSCE should declare itself a regional arrangement by the terms of Chapter VIII of the United Nations Charter. We note with satisfaction that relations between what is now known as the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the United Nations continue to be strengthened. Apart from institutional benefits reaped through regular contact between the two organizations, what is more relevant is the increased cooperation on the ground in the various parts of the OSCE area.

Ever since Dipoli, the site of the first preparatory phase, Malta has contributed to the evolution of the OSCE process. It has promoted the Mediterranean dimension of this process. Mediterranean and European security remain intimately and reciprocally linked. Strengthening of security and cooperation in the Mediterranean is an important element for stability in the OSCE region. Consistent engagement by successive Malta Governments has contributed towards the greater involvement of the Mediterranean Partners for Cooperation in the work of the OSCE. We will continue to work to further this relationship.

The regional approach has reinforced cooperation through the interlocking of different and distinct European and international organizations. In this respect, Malta pays homage to the role of the Council of Europe in protecting and promoting dignity, human rights and fundamental freedoms and in nurturing the principles of human solidarity.

We are particularly heartened by the Secretary-General's stated intention to consolidate the partnership between regional organizations and the United Nations through a more structured, rational and cost-effective division of labour.

Distinct from other organizations, the Commonwealth also continues to advance avenues of cooperation. Cross-regional projects among countries steeped in a common tradition continue to unfold. Malta upholds this international effort through its participation in various programmes that promote sustainable development.

Different scenarios face this Organization. We have learnt that negotiating agreements is not enough. Universality remains a priority as we develop the tools to deal with emerging problems. Reform of this Organization is another priority. Many of its structures must better their effectiveness. Reform is not an end in itself — it is an ongoing process that necessarily requires periodic review. We must remain open to the challenge of change by being innovative and adaptive, seeking to reorient structures established in a different time, without betraying the core principles that remain ever valid.

Malta has steadfastly fostered awareness of the need to revitalize the General Assembly. With its universal, democratic character, this Assembly is the ultimate expression of the principle of the sovereign equality of States. Yet, conditioned by the past, the Assembly has not fully realized its potential. As the international consensus-building forum, its role can be further strengthened, thus enhancing its authority.

Progress has been registered in deliberations on Security Council reform, but consensus still evades us. The question of which categories of membership to expand dominates the discussion and attracts attention. However, other important issues, such as the transparency and openness of the Council, continue to develop. Malta attaches great importance to this aspect, which benefits the widest majority of States.

Security Council decisions legally bind all Member States. Thus, procedures enhancing consultations between Council and Assembly members are of immense value. Improved methods introduced in recent years, while nurturing the symbiotic relationship that should bond Council and Assembly, prove that conferring does not hinder the Council's ability to intervene with the required swiftness.

In seeking solutions, even on what type of expansion the Security Council should undergo, the need for general agreement must be underscored. General agreement is not to be seen in quantitative terms; rather, it should be viewed as a guarantee that solutions have the political

support to come to fruition. Agreement on this sensitive issue must be comprehensive if it is to stand the test of time. Lack of consensus on expanding the permanent member category should not impede further progress.

We support the fallback position of the Non-Aligned Movement to limit enlargement to the non-permanent category for the time being. This will allow the process to move forward without prejudice to an eventual continuation of deliberations on permanent category expansion.

The environment has been the focus of uninterrupted attention since the end of the cold war. The ushering in of a new era of cooperation has enabled the international community to address different areas requiring concerted action. An unprecedented number of treaties and conventions have been negotiated. Treaty bodies and institutions now function effectively, addressing distinct but related areas of concern.

In this new international milieu, the Charter's broader notion of trusteeship assumes renewed relevance. During my presidency of this Assembly, the Trusteeship Council was about to discharge its responsibility for the last of the territories placed under its custody. Some suggested freezing or dismantling the Council. I proposed that the Trusteeship Council be given additional responsibility in coordinating international endeavours that safeguard different areas of the common heritage of humankind.

Since then, many others have proclaimed themselves favourable to this type of reform. The identification of new additional responsibilities for the Trusteeship Council forms part of the reform package proposed by the Secretary-General last year.

We have also taken note of the recommendations of the United Nations Task Force on Environment and Human Settlements in its report to the Secretary-General earlier this year. The positive openness to this proposal is encouraging. Malta intends to participate actively in the recommended consultations to be undertaken by the Executive Director of United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) in preparing for the next regular session of the Governing Council.

The application of the principles of trust and common responsibility in a number of international conventions makes their coordination the natural task of the Trusteeship Council. The principle of trust should retain its rightful place in the institutional framework of this Organization.

The International Year of the Ocean is in its final quarter. Many feel that a forum is needed to consider the closely interrelated problems of ocean space as a whole. The Independent World Commission for the Oceans, on which I have the honour to serve, has vigorously addressed this vital issue. Malta suggests positive consideration of the suggestion that this Assembly institute a biennial committee of the whole to review ocean-related questions in an integrated manner.

Notwithstanding our collective endeavours, peace remains daily threatened in different parts of the world. United Nations deliberations in response to such threats rightfully enjoy a high profile with the public and in the media. In most instances, the success of these deliberations rests on the sheer dedication of the United Nations officials in conflict zones and particularly on the courageous sacrifice of troops forming part of United Nations peacekeeping operations.

This year, we commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of United Nations peacekeeping operations. Peacekeepers have faced risks, humiliation, threat and death. This notwithstanding, they have never faltered in their duty or determination to bring hope where despair often prevails. Despite increasing risks, the United Nations has not shirked its responsibilities. Indeed, it has broadened its peacekeeping mandates. I had the opportunity to personally bring this Assembly's message of solidarity and support to peacekeepers serving in different parts of the world. During the past five decades, the number of peacekeepers who have paid the supreme sacrifice has continued to grow. We salute and pay tribute to their memory.

Like others who have addressed this Assembly before me, I have outlined some challenges facing our Organization. New problems continue to emerge, presenting us with daunting and confounding scenarios. Yet, despite all the odds against it, the United Nations has withstood the test of time. It has survived because it invested faith in humankind and dispensed hope where misery prevailed. It has gradually built the required tools to foster international cooperation.

Obstacles may continue to loom large, yet at no time in human history has the potential been so great. We must seize the opportunity provided us to act in concert. Our commitment to the United Nations is unwavering. Our commitment to sparing humankind from untold suffering is strong. Together, we can head into the new millennium imbued with the founding fathers'

determination to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war. We owe this to ourselves. We will strive to bequeath it to our children.

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): I now call on the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation of Togo, His Excellency Mr. Joseph Kokou Koffigoh.

Mr. Koffigoh (Togo) (*interpretation from French*): Allow me first of all, on behalf of the people of Togo and President Eyadema and his Government, to join in the congratulations extended to you, Sir, since the beginning of our work on your election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its fifty-third session.

We would also like to congratulate his your illustrious predecessor, Mr. Hennadiy Udovenko, on the effective manner in which he conducted the work of the fifty-second session.

I would furthermore like to pay tribute to the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, and his colleagues for their continuous efforts to champion the noble ideals of peace, justice, progress and solidarity embodied by the United Nations.

By way of analysing the situation in Africa, I would like to present Togo's perspective of the world's problems in the context of improved international cooperation.

Africa is democratizing, but it needs peace and security if it is to succeed. Africa is the continent most affected by the great scourges of the planet, but its development is also part of a dynamic of progress. The scourges hampering its development are well known: endemic disease, drought, poverty, political instability, ethnic conflicts, civil wars and regional conflicts. These scourges have a tendency to eclipse the successes.

Since the signing of the Abuja Treaty in 1991, Africa has set itself a timetable for integration in the framework of the African Economic Community, on the basis of strengthening regional groupings of western, northern, central, eastern and southern Africa. These groups are themselves actively engaged in seeking joint solutions to the challenges confronting its member States.

The rate of economic growth of certain African States continues to make progress thanks to good management policies.

A vast democratic movement has begun throughout our continent to build States based on the rule of law. This movement is being followed up by the adoption of new constitutions and the establishment of independent bodies to implement them. Numerous heads of State and of Government have had their mandates challenged in periodic elections. The majority and the opposition representatives of the people have seats in the new representative bodies — parliaments and national assemblies. The success of the functioning of these new constitutional bodies is ensured by independent legal bodies. The press is now free, as are labour unions in most of our States.

I am emphasizing these institutional aspects of building a new Africa because the respect and support of the international community for these institutions is a factor in favour of peace within the particular States, and therefore for peace in our regions.

Experience has shown us that a domestic conflict, by giving rise to an exodus of people to neighbouring countries, also has a rapid and serious effect on the latter. I repeat, as the current situation in the Great Lakes region demonstrates, such domestic conflicts can lead to regional crises.

Togo is among the States that voluntarily established institutions that safeguard the rule of law and that can arbitrate disputes that may arise in the new context of democratization. It is in this framework that the Constitutional Court of Togo declared the results of the presidential election of 21 June 1998 after having arbitrated the disputes that resulted from the election.

Togo's respect for institutions is the very foundation of democracy and peace. On behalf of my Government, I would like to invite all of our partners at the United Nations to support without distinction the efforts of all the countries of Africa that commit themselves to the difficult but rewarding path of building a State of law. This is the price of peace in Africa.

While we can be gratified at the end of certain conflicts — particularly in Liberia and Sierra Leone — and while solutions are in sight to relieve the tensions in Guinea-Bissau, we cannot fail to express our concern over the crisis in the Great Lakes region, the resumption of hostilities in Angola, the continuation of the crisis in Somalia and, finally, the armed confrontation between Ethiopia and Eritrea.

We cannot stress enough the advantages of dialogue and negotiation as the best paths to follow for settling disputes between States on the basis of respect for their territorial integrity.

In that connection, the international community must put an end to the embargo imposed on Libya by implementing the jurisdictional solution accepted by that country and by ensuring a fair trial for the suspects in the Lockerbie bombing. Togo firmly supports the efforts of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) to settle this dispute and end the suffering of the Libyan people.

My country takes this opportunity to repeat its steadfast condemnation of terrorism in all of its forms and to emphasize the need for urgent and concerted action to combat this scourge effectively.

As we are aware, the proliferation of conflict situations in Africa remains a real cause of concern for the international community. I would like to note in this regard the important report (A/52/871) presented by the Secretary-General last February at the request of the Security Council on the causes of conflict and the promotion of durable peace and sustainable development in Africa. That report contains specific recommendations on means of preventing such conflicts and putting an end to them, as well as on measures to be taken to create conditions for lasting peace and economic growth. We hope that the implementation of his recommendations by the Security Council, by the relevant bodies of the United Nations system and by the Bretton Woods institutions will result in the effective prevention of conflicts and put Africa on the road to progress, stability and sustainable development.

Elsewhere in the world, we were relieved to see the signing of an agreement between the Government of Iraq and the United Nations, which made it possible at the last moment to avoid a new confrontation in the Gulf.

In the same region, my Government deplores the present deadlock in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. We remain convinced that only the resumption of direct negotiations between the principals will make it possible to usher in an era of peace, security and prosperity in that region. We were relieved to see the contacts that have taken place between Mr. Yasser Arafat and Mr. Benjamin Netanyahu through the mediation of the American Government. Togo strongly supports this initiative.

With regard to the other crises that assail the world and jeopardize the lives of so many millions of people — particularly in Afghanistan and Kosovo — my country hopes that through firm political will backed by candid and sincere negotiations, the parties to the conflicts will find appropriate solutions that are acceptable to all.

The world's concerns at the dawn of the third millennium are not linked solely to the effects of the phenomenon of globalization. The preservation of peace, security and stability for States and peoples continues to be an important priority. In that context, Togo is gratified to note that the United Nations is continuing to discharge its mission of peacemaking and peacekeeping. In this regard, I welcome the upcoming commemoration on 6 October of 50 years of United Nations peacekeeping operations, and I would like to pay tribute to the memory of all the men and women who have given their lives in the service of the Organization.

My country, which firmly supports the ongoing quest for peace and security for all, would like to emphasize the need to strengthen cooperation in this area, in a spirit of complementarity, between the United Nations and subregional and regional organizations, in accordance with Chapter VIII of the Charter of the United Nations. The appropriate regional machinery necessary to give concrete form to this shared desire for collective maintenance of peace and security should be established.

It is in that spirit that Togo — together with other countries of the West African subregion and in the framework of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) — is working to establish a viable and permanent mechanism for the prevention, management and settlement of conflicts and the maintenance of peace. It is also within this framework that we welcome the fourth extraordinary summit of ECOWAS, held in Lomé from 16 to 17 December 1997, and the holding of the joint military manoeuvres named "Cohesion Kompienga '98", held from 16 to 21 April 1998, in which the armed forces of Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, the Niger, Nigeria, Chad and Togo participated.

Among the goals of the United Nations are vigilance over the maintenance of peace and security, the establishment of conditions for harmonious economic development to ensure the well-being of our populations and working for a just world in which the rights of individuals and peoples are not only recognized and consecrated, but above all respected.

My delegation would like to take this opportunity to hail the holding of the United Nation Diplomatic Conference of Plenipotentiaries on the Establishment of an International Criminal Court, which led to the adoption of the Statute of the court which was held in Rome from 15 June to 17 July.

Togo believes that peace is impossible without justice. The struggle for peace and the struggle for greater justice must be viewed as two complementary aspects of one and the same struggle for the realization of the deepest aspirations of all the peoples of the world. The positive outcome of the negotiations at the Conference resulted in the adoption of the Statute of the court, illustrating anew the vigour and ability of our Organization in dealing with the present and preparing States to face the issues of tomorrow.

It is for that reason that my delegation favours all efforts to reform the Organization that aim to make it more effective, more concerned with the problems of mankind and more democratic, so that the views of all are better reflected and taken into account in all of its bodies.

Togo would therefore like to see the rapid conclusion of discussions to allow for the permanent representation of Africa in the Security Council, in accordance with the resolutions of the Organization of African Unity (OAU). The democracy we are advocating at the national level must also be reflected in international organizations.

The United Nations has always played an important role in the advancement of economic and social development and, when necessary, in providing the men, women and children of the entire world with the assistance on which their survival often depends. We are nevertheless obliged to recognize that despite the efforts made, the improvement of standards of living, full employment and the conditions for progress and economic and social development have not been realized. This is particularly the case in Africa, where continued inequality and poverty, among other things, dangerously imperil the stability of States.

It is true that African economies have performed remarkably well in the last three years; but it is also true that the consolidation of these gains still depends on the international economic environment. Global economic structural constraints — including the continuing burden of debt, the reduction in the flow of official development assistance, currency fluctuations, the inequality of investment flows, weak commodity prices and market protectionism practised by developed countries — still remain the major obstacles to the economic development of African countries.

With regard to the debt burden in particular, my country highly values the declaration of the eighth consultative meeting of the Organization of African Unity, the African Development Bank and the Economic Commission for Africa, which was held in Abidjan in January 1998. We believe that the efforts to alleviate the debt burden must be continued in conjunction with Africa's partners in order to find appropriate solutions to this thorny problem.

In this context, Togo would like to reaffirm the imperative need to hold an international conference on Africa's foreign debt, and it requests the support of the international community to translate that proposal into reality.

Regrettably, at this time of economic globalization, the marginalization of Africa in terms of international trade is accelerating, even though today the development of trade appears to be the most effective means of managing the resources necessary for self-sufficiency. Indeed, the development and economic growth of African States requires as a basic condition sufficient currency inflows from the export of their commodities. Thus, in the view of my delegation, an open world system operating under just and equitable regulations should be established in order to ensure the active participation of African States in international trade. To that end, more liberal measures will be required in order to promote the transformation and diversification of their products as well as to attract and channel investments towards them.

The industrialized countries are attempting to join forces. This shows clearly that today no country, regardless of how powerful it is, can alone provide for its own economic growth and cope with increasingly aggressive international competition. Given this state of affairs, the African countries have in recent years reaffirmed their will to pool their potential by establishing and strengthening subregional units. It is clear that the development policy of our countries must be considered within this framework, for this is the only way that Africa can become a fully fledged and reliable partner in the world of the twenty-first century.

In this respect, the entry into force of the Treaty establishing the African Economic Community serves as

a good illustration of the will of African States to unite their efforts to ensure their own progress.

Togo, which is firmly committed to the policy of economic integration of the continent, wishes to take this opportunity to once again urge the international community to support the efforts of the African countries to achieve the goals of sustainable development which alone can promote prosperity and the well-being of their peoples.

I should like here to underscore an emerging trend in Africa: inter-African parliamentary control of the activities of our regional and subregional organizations. It is in this framework that an inter-parliamentary committee of the West African Economic and Monetary Union was created recently in Bamako; its work is already under way. Also in this framework, a parliamentary assembly was established in the countries of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), in southern Africa. This shows that while, generally speaking, people tend to despair of the future of Africa, we young Africans have faith that Africa is on the right path as long as we have the unswerving support of the international community.

Here I should like once again to welcome the commitment of the Japanese Government to Africa through the Tokyo Conference on the Development of Africa (TICAD), aimed at seeking solutions to the continent's development problems. My delegation would like here once again to thank the Japanese Government for all of its efforts to strengthen cooperation between Africa and Asia, and congratulates it on the convening of TICAD II next October in Tokyo.

Moreover, Togo believes that the combination of TICAD with other initiatives — in particular that of the United States on equitable partnership, known as 20/20 Vision; that of the European Union, within the framework of the Lomé Convention; and that of the francophone world, within the framework of the Hanoi Plan of Action — will help safeguard and consolidate the spirit of solidarity, which Africa wishes to see ever more active and ever more purposeful.

My country is convinced of the need for solidarity among the Members of our Organization and is deeply committed to the noble ideals of peace, freedom and justice and of economic, social and cultural progress, which the United Nations has contributed to advancing. During this year of the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Togo fervently hopes to witness the realization, for the benefit of all humankind, of the profound aspirations of peoples to greater freedom and to a world of peace in which the struggle against poverty, famine and illness grows is daily strengthened.

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): The next speaker is the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Syrian Arab Republic, Mr. Farouk Al-Shara, on whom I now call.

Mr. Al-Shara (Syrian Arab Republic) (*interpretation from Arabic*): I have the pleasure of congratulating you, Sir, on your election to the presidency of the fifty-third session of the General Assembly. We are confident that your wide-ranging expertise in international affairs will facilitate your task and lead the deliberations of this session to a successful conclusion. I should like also to thank your predecessor, Mr. Hennadiy Udovenko, for his wise leadership and invaluable contributions during the preceding session of the Assembly. Nor can I fail to express our thanks and appreciation to the Secretary-General of our Organization, Mr. Kofi Annan, for the efforts he is exerting to enhance the role of the United Nations in international affairs.

Following the end of the cold war a decade ago, many, especially in the countries of the North, believed that this planet, which is home to approximately 6 billion people, was going to become a more stable, secure and prosperous world. That conviction proceeded from the notion that the bi-polar system was unable to achieve international security except in the framework of a balance of terror. Nor was the old system able to resolve regional conflicts due to competition for areas of influence.

The question now before the international community is the following: were these convictions justified? Or did wishful thinking leapfrog reality, ignoring the following salient facts?

First, nuclear weapons, which are unparalleled in their destructive capability, have proliferated since the end of the cold war and have now reached India and Pakistan. This proliferation has also gained a sort of legitimacy based on the fact that Israel's possession of nuclear weapons was not spoken of during the 1995 Review and Extension Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. My country, Syria, Arab countries and most countries in the Non-Aligned Movement appealed to the five nuclear-weapon States during the review and extension

conferences for this Treaty not to exempt any country from adhering to this Treaty, so that the world will not face a new nuclear arms race. Unfortunately that urgent call fell on deaf ears. Those who now assume that nuclear-arms proliferation will be limited to a few countries are mistaken. Syria and all Arab countries call for turning the Middle East into a nuclear-weapon-free zone, as a serious contribution to halting the nuclear-arms race.

Secondly, in the post-cold-war era regional conflicts have multiplied, becoming more fierce, and with varying forms and motives. This has happened to such an extent that the United States, which is now the only super-Power in a unipolar world, and the Security Council, the body responsible for maintaining international peace and security, are no longer able to contain these conflicts, let alone find just solutions to them. Anyone who reads the statement issued by the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of the five permanent members of the Security Council, issued at the beginning of this session of the General Assembly, will have a headache and will be severely frustrated at seeing this world face so many regional conflicts and so many complicated crises without any light at the end of the tunnel.

Thirdly, we have the recent economic and financial crises in the world, particularly following the collapse of financial markets in South-East Asia and the accompanying sharp decline in the prices of raw materials, especially oil. All of this has proven that economic globalization is a two-edged sword and has repercussions which cannot be confined to those countries tantalized by rapid prosperity generated by an inflow of capital and foreign investments. Rather, such effects go beyond those countries to the countries exporting capital and investments, which were also tempted by quick profits without paying much heed to the consequences.

What is going on in the world now under the banner of globalization is a cause for concern, because it gives priority to profit over other development factors: economic, social, cultural and environmental. It also strives to confine the role of the State to providing guarantees and protection to major market forces, ignoring the responsibility for the achievement of social justice for the peoples. Furthermore, the continuing marginalization of developing countries in international economic decision-making and the continuing severe restrictions on access by such countries to international markets and financial and technological resources render these countries unable to benefit from the promised opportunities of globalization.

Strengthening development indicators and increasing levels of productivity are the more durable means of limiting the effects of economic crises and reducing the effects of financial upheavals, especially in developing countries. At any rate, we believe that such crises and shake-ups may happen from time to time and may touch every country, no matter how immune it may seem, so long as the most powerful and prevalent monetary unit in the world — the United States dollar — is not stable. However, the imminent issuance of a European monetary unit may contribute to establishing a more stable international financial and economic system.

In any case, we believe there is no alternative to opening a serious dialogue within the framework of the United Nations between developing and developed countries and international monetary institutions in order to lay a solid foundation for international cooperation which might save the world from economic surprises and social upheavals and also contribute positively to the interests of all countries in the world, in the South as well as the North.

Since its beginning, the Arab-Israeli conflict has been given high priority on the agenda of the international community. International efforts to contain this conflict have been unrelenting every time it has exploded, because the Middle East, with its singular strategic position, its tremendous material and spiritual wealth and its renowned cultural heritage can be considered the most sensitive parameter for measuring the state of world peace and security.

The peace process that was launched in Madrid was seen as a new beginning to settle this conflict with the end of the cold war. The Madrid terms of reference, the American assurances and the results reached constituted a firm basis which cannot be ignored under any circumstance.

The insistence of the Israeli Prime Minister on pursuing a policy hostile to peace and his rejection of the rights of the Arabs to regain the occupied territories under the pretext of security for Israel alone — at a time when Israel's military arsenal is considered one of the mightiest and most modern in the world — constitute a challenge not only to the Arabs, but also to the will of the international community as a whole.

It seems clear that Israel does not limit its conception of security to the Arab territories it occupies; rather it is working to establish a military alliance in the

region which will undermine the peace process and put the region on a path fraught with dangers, tension and the potential for explosion.

What the region and its peoples need is not the establishment of alliances and axes but the establishment of a just and comprehensive peace, based on the full withdrawal of Israel from the occupied Syrian Golan to the line of 4 June 1967 and from the south of Lebanon and its western Bekaa, in implementation of the relevant Security Council resolutions and the land-for-peace principle. In addition, the legitimate national rights of the Palestinian people must be safeguarded, including their right to self-determination and the establishment of their independent State on their national territory.

The peace process faces a real crisis. It has been in a stalemate on the Syrian and Lebanese tracks for over two years. It faces erosion on the Palestinian track, as well, due to Israeli intransigence. The entire peace process is on the wane and will be so long as the Israeli Government rejects the principle of land for peace and attempts to impose on the Arabs a peace based on occupation and settlerism. However, Syria has been and continues to be committed to peace; we consider it a strategic option that requires the resumption of negotiations from the point at which they stopped on the Syrian and Lebanese tracks and that continues to build on the commitments and undertakings reached until a just and comprehensive peace is established in the region.

Syria stresses its concern for the unity and territorial integrity of Iraq and calls for alleviating the suffering of our brotherly Iraqi people and lifting the sanctions imposed on them according to a specific timetable. In the meantime, Iraq is called upon to implement the remaining Security Council resolutions in a way that guarantees a just resolution to the issue of Kuwaiti prisoners of war.

Syria also calls for an end to the sanctions imposed on Libya, for it is our belief that it is possible to address this crisis in an appropriate legal framework, separate from any political motivation. We fully support the Libyan demand for a solution to this problem on a just basis.

Syria stands against terrorism in all its forms and manifestations; we condemn it on all fronts. We differentiate between terrorism and the legitimate struggle of peoples against foreign occupation and for self-determination and national liberation, which cannot be considered terrorism. We also condemn killing innocent civilians everywhere, just as we condemn the State terrorism exercised by Israel against the Arabs.

We believe that resorting to force and violence in international relations, in contravention of the United Nations Charter and the principles of international law, does not promote international legitimacy but leaves the door wide open to the law of the jungle. In this regard, Syria finds the United States attack on the Al-Shifa pharmaceutical facility in Sudan to be unjustified. We believe that this attack constitutes a violation of the principles of international law and the Charter of the United Nations. From this perspective, Syria supports the request of the Sudanese Government to the Security Council to send a fact-finding mission to investigate the American allegations relating to that installation.

Mr. Mra (Myanmar), Vice-President, took the Chair.

Syria follows with great concern the sharp conflicts sweeping some African countries. While expressing its solidarity and support to the peoples of Africa, Syria calls on the international community to make the necessary efforts in close cooperation with the Organization of African Unity to find solutions to these conflicts in a manner that consolidates peace, stability and security on the African continent. The international community is also called upon to give all types of support to enable African States to eliminate the scourge of poverty and free themselves of the burden of debt in order to achieve sustainable development.

We are also following with great concern the situation in the Republic of Somalia. We urge all the Somali parties to respect their undertakings and implement the agreements reached among them. We call on them to put the national interests of Somalia above all other considerations and to cooperate with Arab, African and international efforts towards the realization of national reconciliation so as to guarantee the return of security and stability for the Somali people.

Syria supports the measures taken to ensure the achievement of peace and security in the Korean peninsula, and we also support the Korean people's aspirations to achieve unity.

Syria stresses anew the urgent need to take all necessary steps, as promptly as possible, to end the economic, commercial and financial sanctions imposed by the United States against Cuba for more than three

decades now. We second Cuba's call for the resolution of differences between the two countries through dialogue, on the basis of equality, mutual respect and good-neighbourly relations.

Syria is extremely concerned about the general situation in Afghanistan and the continuing bloodshed. Syria strongly condemns the killing of the Iranian diplomats in Mazar-i-Sharif. This was a violation of the principles of international law and of the tolerant values of Islam. We call upon all parties to exercise self-restraint and to work towards reaching a peaceful solution and national reconciliation.

Syria supports the stand of the Non-Aligned Movement which considers the reform of the Security Council, its democratization and the expansion of its membership as part and parcel of a package deal that is not subject to a specific timetable. We emphasize the principles of equal sovereignty among States and equitable geographical representation according to the provisions of the Charter. Syria also believes that the exercise of the right of veto should be reduced and that its scope should be limited.

We support the position of the Non-Aligned Movement concerning the concept of general agreement, specifically that such agreement should, in conformity with the provisions of Article 108 of the Charter, require a majority of two thirds of Member States.

The Secretary-General's proposed plan for reform was a positive step to improve the Organization's efficiency and enable it to cope with the changes required in the next stage. The Syrian delegation participated in the discussions relevant to reforming the United Nations in the spirit of collective responsibility of Member States to enhance the role of this international Organization. We believe that Member States do have a major role to play in consultations concerning the reforms and in the resulting resolutions.

The fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is an important occasion for re-emphasizing the fact that all human rights are universal and interrelated and that the international community should address human rights in a just and comprehensive manner, free of double standards and manipulations for political purposes or to interfere in the internal affairs of States, and taking into account the national characteristics and the historical, cultural and religious elements of each people and nation.

Humankind continues to aspire to a world free of wars, poverty, ignorance and injustice, a world in which justice, security, stability and sustainable development prevail. Peoples of the world have pinned their hopes on the United Nations Charter, which specifies among its purposes the importance of maintaining world peace and security, developing relations among nations based on respect for equality and self-determination of peoples, achieving international cooperation in the economic, social and cultural fields and enhancing basic freedoms for mankind everywhere.

Let us work together seriously and confidently on the basis of these principles and objectives. Let us not disappoint future generations. This is not an easy task, but it is certainly a noble one, which deserves our efforts, sacrifice, patience and wisdom.

The Acting President: I call on the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan, His Excellency Mr. Tofik Zulfugarov.

Mr. Zulfugarov (Azerbaijan) (*interpretation from Russian*): Allow me first of all to sincerely congratulate the President on his unanimous election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its fifty-third session, and to express confidence that under his efficient leadership the Assembly will cope successfully with the complex issues before it.

I would like to express our special gratitude to Mr. Hennadiy Udovenko, whose vast experience and great professionalism greatly contributed to the success of the previous session, and whose work as President during the fifty-second session epitomized the United Nations commitment to the process of transformation aimed at enhancing the effectiveness of the Organization.

All aspects of life in Azerbaijan are covered by the process of radical reform directed at creating a democratic, secular society governed by the rule of law and based on a market economy. In spite of the current objective difficulties caused by the consequences of armed conflict and the problems inherent in the transitional period, Azerbaijan does not see any alternative to the course of democratic transformation it has taken, and considers the strengthening of its democratic institutions a priority of its State policy.

Respect for fundamental political and civil rights and freedoms, the functioning of the multi-party system, the protection of the interests of each citizen in our society

irrespective of ethnic origin, independence of the judiciary, as well as the advancement of other elements of democratic society, are guaranteed by the Constitution of the Republic of Azerbaijan, which was adopted on 12 November 1995 in a national referendum. A great deal has been done to bring the legislative system of the country in line with relevant international standards.

Presidential elections that are to take place in Azerbaijan on 11 October this year will constitute a milestone in the process of further strengthening the democratic foundation of the society. Actions already undertaken by the leadership of the country have laid the foundation for genuinely free and just elections. A new law on presidential elections in the Republic of Azerbaijan was thoroughly examined by the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the Council of Europe and meets the most rigorous international standards in this field.

The election process will be observed by 300 international monitors from the OSCE, the Council of Europe and other international organizations, as well as from institutions of individual countries, such as the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs in the United States. The widest possible participation of national monitors has been provided for. The leadership of the country has declared its commitment to conducting free and just elections, considering it a significant event in the history of the Azerbaijan State.

Positive developments resulting from current reforms can also be observed in the country's economy. At the initial stage of its formation the young Azerbaijan State faced internal instability, lack of a progressive legislative basis for the market economy, disintegration of traditional economic and trade relations, economic recession and a huge budget deficit. These elements have created serious obstacles to economic development. Armed aggression by neighbouring Armenia has had the most negative impact on the situation in Azerbaijan. It has resulted in the occupation of one fifth of its territory, the emergence of about 1 million refugees and internally displaced persons and the continuance of the 10-year-old blockade of the Nakhichevan region of Azerbaijan by Armenia.

The course of building a democratic society based on a market economy, taken by the leadership of the country, has created the prerequisites for drastic economic reforms. Since 1995, the Government of Azerbaijan has been implementing a comprehensive programme of economic stabilization. Fiscal, monetary and credit policies have been streamlined and structural reforms to liberalize the economy have been completed. We have achieved macroeconomic stability, as well as stability of the national currency. In fact, inflation rates have practically been reduced to zero, and since 1996 steady growth in the gross domestic product has been restored. Internal stability achieved as a result of the leadership's consistent policy, as well as reforms implemented, have provided a favourable climate for investments in the country.

Today, Azerbaijan continues with the reform of its banking system and privatization of State-owned enterprises. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank for their support to the stabilization programme in Azerbaijan and for financing the structural transformations in its economy. I would like to offer our assurances of the irreversibility of the course of economic reforms taken by our Government and to express the hope that these important financial institutions will increase their assistance to Azerbaijan.

In its economic policy, our country attaches the highest priority to its integration into the world economy. Situated at the junction of Eastern and Western civilization, and having been for centuries a link between Europe and Asia, Azerbaijan is implementing a systematic programme aimed at its smooth integration into the world economy, and attaches great importance to the development of fruitful and mutually beneficial regional cooperation based on mutual respect for the sovereignty and interests of all States, as well as on the principle of non-interference in internal affairs of other countries.

In this connection, the country's leadership regards as strategically important the concept of creating an East-West corridor, and in particular the development of the Europe-Caucasus-Asia transportation link. The Transport Corridor: Europe-Caucasus-Asia (TRACECA) programme, established by the Commission of the European Union in 1993, is designed to promote the development of interconnected national and regional transportation infrastructures to enhance cooperation between countries in Europe, the Black Sea region, the Caucasus, the Caspian Sea region and Asia. Implementation of this programme will provide reliable access to the trans-European and trans-Asian transportation systems for the landlocked countries of the Caucasus and Central Asia. During the last five years close interaction between the States involved in the

programme and active support by the Commission of the European Union have contributed to substantial progress in modernization and construction of communications, the development of relevant laws and codes and the improvement of the customs and tariff policies of participant States.

The results of five years of work were reviewed at the International Conference on the Restoration of the Historic Silk Route, held at the capital of Azerbaijan, the city of Baku, on 7-8 September this year. That Conference brought together delegations from 32 countries, including nine heads of State, and representatives of 13 international organizations. The major outcome of the Conference was the signing of the Principal multilateral agreement on international transport for development of the corridor Europe-Caucasus-Asia, which is an important institutional mechanism for promoting the development and regulation of international transportation, as well as for coordinating and harmonizing transportation policies and legal frameworks in this field of transportation. The Baku Conference has become a major cornerstone in terms of strengthening and enhancing cooperation aimed at the further development of the Europe-Caucasus-Asia transportation corridor in the interests of the economic progress of all the participating States.

The delegation of Azerbaijan is counting on the support of the other Member States for this programme. We are convinced that the restoration of the historic silk route and the involvement of other countries and regions in this project would provide a strong impetus to the process of rapprochement and reciprocal enrichment of our peoples, a strengthening of their independence and sovereignty, as well as the successful implementation in those States of democratic and market-oriented reforms.

Carrying out plans to deliver carbohydrate resources produced by Azerbaijan and other countries of the Caspian basin to world markets by means of multiple pipelines is an integral part of the East-West concept, which is of inestimable importance for strengthening the independence and security of sovereign States, as well as for their economic and other development. We expect international financial institutions and other investors to show due interest in these projects, which can rightly be called a bridge to the third millennium.

Unfortunately, however, we are obliged to admit that the model of the progressive development of sovereign States of the region proposed by Azerbaijan is not accepted by all. The position taken by Armenia in the region still remains a serious obstacle to this process.

The question of a settlement of the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan, which has lasted for more than 10 years now, is a key issue in Azerbaijan's foreign policy. Relevant resolutions of the Security Council and the decisions of the OSCE have made it possible to create a necessary normative legal basis for the settlement of this conflict. In this context, it is necessary in particular to stress the codifying role and universality of the principles contained in the Lisbon statement made by the Chairman-in-Office of the OSCE. These principles, namely, recognition of the territorial integrity of Armenia and Azerbaijan, a high level of autonomy for Nagorny Karabakh within the Azerbaijan State and the provision of security and safety for the entire population of Nagorny Karabakh, are fully in keeping with the principles enshrined in the Helsinki Final Act of 1975 and are comprehensive in nature, which makes possible their application with an equal degree of effectiveness not only to the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan, but to all other regional conflicts as well.

A positive balance has recently been achieved. An institute of mediation has been created, comprising the Minsk Group of the OSCE and its Co-Chairmen. The parameters for the settlement process have been established, providing for the elimination of the consequences of the armed conflict and, on this basis, a resolution of the political problems. As a result of Azerbaijan's persistence, it was possible in October 1997 to find points of contiguity with Armenia's position, and real opportunities for progress have emerged. The subsequent internal political events in Armenia, however, and the resulting drastic revision of its attitudes led to a decline in the dynamism of the Minsk process.

A just and lasting settlement cannot be achieved by Armenia's military pressure on Azerbaijan, by its continuing occupation of parts of the territory of the Republic of Azerbaijan and by increasing its military potential there, by putting forward preconditions for the resumption of negotiations on the basis of the results of Armenia's aggression, or by imposing new procedural frameworks on the negotiations process, in order to perpetuate the situation resulting from the conflict.

Illegal transfers of arms from Russia to Armenia, worth more than $1 billion, and regular joint military exercises of those countries designed to increase the offensive potential of the Armenia's armed forces not

only prevent a facilitation of the settlement, but also have a direct destabilizing impact on the situation in the region.

Azerbaijan once again states its commitment to a peaceful resolution of the conflict and the strict implementation of the ceasefire regime, until an agreement on the settlement of the armed conflict is reached, in the hopes that the same approach will be taken by the Armenian side. Azerbaijan calls on Armenia to accept the proposals of the Co-Chairmen of the Minsk Conference as a basis for negotiations within the format of the Minsk Group. Today, as never before, it is important for the international community to preserve its consistency, determination and persistence in upholding its declared position on the settlement of the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

Nobody should be in any doubt that progressive development of the States of the region can only be achieved through the establishment of just and lasting peace and stability in the southern Caucasian region on the basis of respect for sovereignty and the territorial integrity of its States. Azerbaijan believes that international organizations, as well as the entire international community, should more actively utilize their potential to further promote the peaceful negotiation process and the achievement of a political settlement to the conflict.

During its last session, in response to the recommendations of the Secretary-General, the General Assembly adopted important decisions aimed at reforming the Organization. Azerbaijan regards the work already done to this end as a solid basis for further adaptation of the Organization to the quickly changing needs and imperatives of today's world. We stand ready to further contribute to the implementation of these decisions intended to prepare the world Organization better to meet the challenges of the twenty-first century.

Undoubtedly, in this regard, the reform of the Security Council is of special importance. In our view, it is expedient to adopt relevant decisions on this extremely sensitive issue on the basis of the broadest support of Member States and in accordance Article 108 of the Charter. Asia, Africa and Latin America should be represented in both categories of membership of the Security Council in a manner appropriate to current political realities. Given the fact that the number of countries in the Eastern European Group has doubled, we once again point out the need to allocate to that Group an additional non-permanent seat on the Security Council.

Addressing the question of the reform of the Security Council and the enhancement of the efficiency of its work, we cannot fail to draw attention to the fact that the four Security Council resolutions on the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan have still not been implemented.

We have repeatedly stressed that a review of the personnel policy of the United Nations should be an integral part of the Organization's reform. We remain extremely concerned by the fact that the Republic of Azerbaijan is still not represented in the Secretariat.

It is unfortunate that emergencies arising from military conflicts and acts of military aggression are still a pressing issue today. Millions of people continue to lose their homes, health and property, and are becoming internally displaced persons.

The people of my country have experienced the pain and misfortune of such a loss, having fallen victim to the Armenian aggression of which I have spoken. Every seventh citizen of Azerbaijan bears the burdens of the refugee's life, deprived of his home in his native land, suffering from heat in summer and cold in winter in temporary tent camps. In occupied Azerbaijani territory, hundreds of towns and villages have been destroyed, practically all of the houses, schools, hospitals and industrial facilities have been burned down or plundered and ancient cultural monuments have been razed. Coping with the refugee emergency and the restoration of what has been lost are two of the main concerns of the Azerbaijan State. These problems cannot be resolved until the occupying forces are withdrawn from Azerbaijani territory and all the refugees and displaced persons have been returned to the places from which they were expelled by force.

The Azerbaijan Government is doing a great deal to alleviate the situation. The role of the United Nations and its agencies in this process can scarcely be overestimated. In addition to providing direct humanitarian assistance to refugees and internally displaced persons, at the present time a project is under way to restore a part of the Fisuli district, which was freed from the occupying Armenian units. This project is being carried out by the Government of Azerbaijan, the World Bank, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and other agencies and organizations. However, the emerging trend of reduction in the volume of humanitarian assistance to Azerbaijan cannot fail to disturb us. While

expressing our most sincere gratitude to the United Nations, its specialized agencies and donor countries for their support and concrete assistance, we call on them not to decrease in the future the volume of their humanitarian aid to the people in Azerbaijan who are suffering from aggression and who live in the most unbearable conditions.

I should like to advantage of this opportunity to briefly refer to our cooperation with UNDP, which is playing a very positive role in the social, political and economic development of our country. Assistance from UNDP, the major source of subsidies necessary for carrying out development activities, is vital to resolve a number of serious problems in Azerbaijan that were mentioned earlier. We welcome the system of Resident Coordinators and highly commend the activity of the Resident Coordinator in Azerbaijan, designated by the Secretary-General, who is acting as the leader of the United Nations team in the country. At the same time, given the difficult financial constraints facing UNDP, I should like to call upon all Member States to increase their voluntary contributions to the budget of the Programme so that the recipient countries, including Azerbaijan, can more effectively use its potential to their advantage.

The consolidation of efforts of Member States with a view to launching a decisive attack against crime, drugs and terrorism continues to be a priority. Combating these phenomena can be successful only if all countries truly join forces. Azerbaijan, which has had to confront these real threats to its sovereignty and territorial integrity, in particular from Armenian terrorism, considers itself an active participant in the fight against these evils.

Azerbaijan welcomes the results of the Rome Diplomatic Conference to establish an International Criminal Court. We are convinced that an efficient, capable, independent and authoritative court will contribute to strengthening international cooperation for the effective prosecution and suppression of aggression, genocide and military crimes, which are the most heinous crimes constituting a threat to international peace and security. As a State that is experiencing all the sufferings and tragedy of aggression by Armenia, Azerbaijan is deeply interested in the establishment and effective functioning of international legal mechanisms for the prosecution of those responsible for the aforementioned crimes.

There are fewer than 500 days remaining until the end of this century, and we have no time to relax, no right to rest on our laurels. Approaching the end of the historic nineties, the United Nations, bringing together both the prosperous States and those who have overcome numerous calamities but have gained their independence and stability, must take all necessary measures to justify the efforts already made and to achieve the objectives that have been set. Fulfilment of the tasks at hand and finding solutions to the problems we face constitute the baggage that this respected Organization and its Member States will take with them into the twenty-first century.

The Acting President: I now call on the head of delegation of the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, His Excellency Mr. Abuzed Omar Dorda.

Mr. Dorda (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) (*interpretation from Arabic*): Allow me at the outset to congratulate Mr. Opertti on his accession to the presidency of the General Assembly at this session. His election is a tribute to his friendly country and an expression of confidence in his ability to shoulder this great responsibility.

I also take this opportunity to express our deep appreciation to Mr. Hennadiy Udovenko for his skilful guidance of the deliberations of the previous session of the General Assembly. Furthermore, I would also like to express my country's high appreciation to Secretary-General Kofi Annan for his initiatives, which have helped ease tensions in a number of regions, and for his efforts in making a series of serious proposals for the reform of the United Nations and to reactivate its role, thereby allowing it to perform the functions entrusted to it by the Charter.

The United Nations is the only Organization which enjoys universal membership. That is why it is the sole forum qualified to deal with urgent international, political, economic and social problems. To address these questions effectively, it is essential, first and foremost, to observe the principles of the Charter of the United Nations, which must govern both the work of the Organization and the conduct of its Members. Our commitment to the principles of sovereign equality, non-interference in the internal affairs of States and abstention from the threat or use of force requires us to oppose the ambitions and practices of certain countries that seek to impose their hegemony and influence and to monopolize privileges.

The mandated powers of the General Assembly, in particular, should be expanded to allow it to play its rightful role, which is based on equality among all its members and on the fact that they all deliberate on an equal footing, including in their consideration of

questions of international peace and security. It would be helpful in this respect to establish a mechanism to enable the Assembly to oversee the work of other organs, including the Security Council, and to hold them accountable to it. Any wealthy country in arrears that cares about the United Nations should pay those arrears immediately and unconditionally, because they are to blame for the financial deterioration affecting the activities of the Organization.

The reform of the United Nations will remain incomplete without reforming the Security Council to eliminate the privilege of the veto power. Historically and in terms of justice, equality and democracy, there is no longer any justification for that power. My country was the first to call for the abrogation of the veto power in the second half of this century. Moreover, it is essential to remove the current imbalance in the membership of the Security Council, not by granting certain countries permanent membership, but through an increase in the number of its members, based on the principle of full sovereign equality among States and the application of the principle of equitable geographical distribution in both categories of Council membership: permanent and non-permanent. The reform of the Council should, first and foremost, respond to the needs of the developing countries, which constitute the majority of the United Nations membership, and to the need to avoid selectivity.

Despite the efforts of African countries and their Organization, conflict is on the rise and economic conditions are further deteriorating on that continent. Whatever development or increase in income they achieve goes to servicing debts that weigh heavily on them all. In his report on the situation in Africa, the Secretary-General explains that this situation is the result of the policies adopted by the colonial Powers at the 1885 Congress of Berlin to partition the continent. These policies remain the root cause of conflict in Africa. The report further indicates that Africa's problems, including political instability in some parts and economic underdevelopment in most of the continent, were caused by those who drew the political borders of African countries. We call for the cancellation of Africa's debts and for the continent to be dealt with on new and fair bases, not just as a source of raw materials and a market for the consumption of manufactured goods.

The responsibility for all that has happened and is still taking place on the African continent falls to those who caused it in the first place. Therefore, it is high time for the States that colonized Africa, exploited its resources and enslaved its peoples to apologize to the continent and to pay full compensation for all the losses it has incurred as a result of colonialism.

The imposition of restrictions on international trade and the legislation of extraterritorial laws require serious action on our part to confront and put an end to them. Member States are called upon to support and vote in favour of the relevant draft resolution to be submitted to the General Assembly at this session and not to recognize such unilateral laws, which undermine the lofty principles of the United Nations Charter, flagrantly violate the rules of international law, encroach on the sovereignty of Member States and blatantly interfere in their internal affairs.

The question of Palestine is still awaiting a solution. All developments, past and present, serve only to confirm what my country has repeatedly stated: Occupation by force and the dictation and imposition of surrender can never lead to peace. No support for the occupation and the settlement policy or undermining of the balance of power will help to establish peace. The displaced Palestinians living outside their land are far more numerous than those who live on Palestinian territory. What kind of peace is it that prevents a people from returning to their territory, their homeland?

The continued occupation of the Syrian Golan since 1967, the occupation of southern Lebanon, and the way in which the Security Council has been prevented from implementing its resolution 425 (1978) are further proof of the weakening of the United Nations as a result of the intervention of the major Powers. In this respect, we would ask: Why does the Security Council insist on the implementation of some and not all of its resolutions? So long as the United Nations remains paralysed by the blatant interference of the powerful, who exploit it only to serve their own interests and prevent it from acting when there is a question of deterring or repulsing aggression by their allies, this glaring injustice will continue to push the Middle East towards the abyss.

The achievement of the universality of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) and the expansion of nuclear-weapon-free zones are facing major obstacles. In the Arab East, the rulers of Tel Aviv still refuse to adhere to the NPT. They refuse to place their nuclear facilities under the control regime of the International Atomic Energy Agency. They continue to develop their nuclear capabilities with the financial and technical support of the United States, the very country

that, under the pretext of saving the world from chemical weapons, threatens to attack any Arab country, including my own, merely for building a pharmaceutical plant. The recent destruction of the Sudanese pharmaceutical factory under such flimsy pretexts, later proven false, is still fresh in our minds.

Nobody should be deceived by the utterings of the rulers of Tel Aviv to the effect that the Arabs and their weapons are a source of danger. Neither Libya nor any other Arab State constitutes a threat to the peace of the region, let alone the whole world. These are countries that neither produce nor export weapons. Washington has destroyed the weapons that Iraq once had and has imposed embargoes on other countries to prevent Iraq from importing arms. The real danger to security in the region and the entire world comes from the Israelis, who possess hundreds of nuclear warheads. So long as nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction are not destroyed in all the countries that possess them, any lesser effort will represent a great attempt to deceive the whole world.

Since the dawn of time, humanity has been afflicted by a phenomenon that has been exacerbated in modern times: national and international terrorism. The annals of history record terrorist acts, their victims and their perpetrators. If we peruse these records, much is revealed. They show that those self-styled fighters against terrorism were the first to perpetrate terrorism. By posing as fighters of terrorism, they are trying to cover the terrorist crimes they have committed and still commit against other countries and peoples. Their history is no more than a series of terrorist acts against other peoples, which have reached the stage of total annihilation of entire peoples.

These self-styled fighters of terrorism have attempted to brand movements of liberation and the struggle for freedom and against occupation as terrorist. They still describe all fighters for freedom and independence as terrorists. But they fail miserably when most fighters for the freedom and independence of their countries eventually triumph. Suddenly, those who fought against these freedom fighters and backed those who enslaved them are ready to roll out the red carpet for them, organize the greatest receptions and award them the highest medals. This General Assembly embraces a number of such leaders every year and, only a few days ago, gave the fighter and leader Nelson Mandela an outstanding reception.

Libya is proud to have been among the countries that supported these leaders during their struggle. Libya takes pride in their victories. Libya took that position at a time when those who now claim to fight terrorism used to describe those leaders as terrorists. Libya knows that the change in these countries' attitudes following the triumph of revolutionaries and freedom fighters neither reflects principled morality, nor aims at atoning for past mistakes. It is due to a desire to preserve their interests and to gain greater political and economic advantages.

When we talk of terrorism, we should know our subject. Our talk must be objective and we need to agree on a single definition of terrorism. We should apply the same criteria and the same rules and laws. We must also implement the same measures and procedures. We cannot condemn terrorism and fight it when it hits a certain country, then turn a blind eye when it hits other countries or other peoples. The occupation of Lebanon, the surrounding of its capital and the attack on Qana were acts of terrorism. The aggression against Libya in 1986 and earlier was terrorism. The invasion of Grenada was terrorism. The kidnapping of a head of State is terrorism. Maintaining military bases on other peoples' territory is terrorism. Navies' threats and attacks against peoples and violation of their territorial waters — this is terrorism. Attempts on the lives of national leaders are terrorism. The downing of a Libyan civilian airplane over Sinai was terrorism. The downing of the Iranian airplane in the Gulf was terrorism. Forcing the Security Council to react to a missile that fell in the sea and preventing it from reacting to missiles that were intentionally launched against a pharmaceutical plant in a peaceful city, Khartoum, and from sending a mere fact-finding mission — this is terrorism. In this respect, we forcefully support Sudanese demands for investigation and compensation and condemn this terrorist aggression.

Are we supposed to condemn terrorism only when it touches a certain country or countries? Should we turn a blind eye and a deaf ear to what is being committed by that country or those countries against humanity as a whole? This, too, is terrorism. Terrorism will be eradicated only when its causes, not just its results, are addressed; not by committing similar terrorist acts. We cannot fight terrorism with terrorism. As one Arab poet says:

> "Practise what you preach. Great shame on you if you do not."

We in Libya condemn terrorist acts, their perpetrators, their sponsors and those who finance them. We are ready to cooperate with all countries that truly want to put an end to terrorism. Libya, in a letter to the

Secretary-General dated 9 January 1992 (document A/46/840), was the first to call on the United Nations to convene a special session of the General Assembly to be devoted to international terrorism.

In this respect, we wish to note that some people insist, in and out of context, on linking Islam and Muslims to terrorism. This in itself is another kind of terrorism. The very name of Islam is derived from the word *salaam*, which means "peace". A person is considered a Muslim when others are safe from his words and his deeds. The greeting of Muslims, when coming or going, is *assalamu alaikum*, meaning "peace be upon you", and the answer is "and the same to you".

It seems believable that, as has been demonstrated in some works and studies, certain people can determine their own identity only by identifying their enemy. Now that the ideological enemy, embodied for several decades in the communist ideology, has disappeared, they have chosen Islam as their new alternative adversary. Upon the disappearance of the international opponent, the former Soviet Union, they chose the Muslims to be the new enemy.

At this juncture, let us ask the following questions, though we know in advance that they will go unanswered. First, who recruited, transported, financed, trained and armed those who fought in Afghanistan during the presence of Soviet troops there? Secondly, who called these people *mujahidin* when they fought against the Soviets in Afghanistan? And who now calls them terrorists? How and why did yesterday's *mujahid* become today's terrorist? Thirdly, where do the leaders of the organizations which plan and supervise the implementation of terrorist actions in their homelands live? Sisterly Algeria is not the only example. Fourthly, who protects these people? Who finances them? Who arms them? Who trains them? Where? And Why?

These and other, similar questions will not be publicly acknowledged by the parties concerned, but that does not mean that there is no answer. Islam is the victim. Muslims are the targets and victims of terrorism, alongside the rest of third world peoples. God Almighty addresses his Prophet and Messenger in the Koran by saying:

> "We sent thee not, but as a mercy for all creatures."
> (*The Holy Koran, XXI:107*)

Verily spoke God. The Prophet of mercy preached the religion of mercy, not terrorism.

My country has always sought to make the Mediterranean a region of security, cooperation and peace. It is a source of satisfaction that in July this year we issued a joint statement with Italy which eliminated many aspects of the legacy of the past and laid down a solid basis for cooperation to serve the interests of both countries and peoples and contribute to the strengthening of peace and stability in that strategic part of the world. We believe that this is a model that should be emulated in other arrangements, including European and Mediterranean partnerships. Among the issues on which the peoples of the Mediterranean should cooperate and act in solidarity is the foreign military presence in the region. We in Libya would again like to express our concern about this presence. We again call on foreign States to dismantle their military bases around the Mediterranean and withdraw their fleets from its waters. Their presence poses a danger to the peoples of the region.

The world is still witnessing a continuation of old disputes and conflicts such as those in Cyprus, Afghanistan, Angola and Somalia. These conflicts have persisted for too long, despite all the efforts made to resolve them peacefully. The international community should increase its efforts to settle these disputes and end the suffering of their peoples.

The people of Iraq are suffering from international sanctions which are unprecedented in their severity and cruelty. These sanctions have resulted in human tragedies which could never be accepted by principled human beings. Other countries have exploited these sanctions in order to achieve their own selfish political purpose of destroying Iraq, violating its territorial integrity and breaking up its unity. This will have disastrous consequences sooner or later. Furthermore, it is a violation of the Charter, the principles of international law and all international norms.

In the Horn of Africa the situation in Somalia is still a source of great concern. My country has consistently made efforts to assist the competing Somali factions solve their differences. We will continue those efforts with a view to reaching a solution to ensure Somali national reconciliation that is satisfactory to all Somalis. The Jamahiriya, which has the honour of presiding over the group of Sahel and desert countries, has submitted a serious initiative for the settlement of the dispute between Ethiopia and Eritrea. This initiative, which enjoys full recognition, remains the best framework for the solution

of the border dispute between the two countries and the normalization of relations between their two peoples.

I should now like to provide an account of the latest developments in the dispute between my country and the United States and the United Kingdom over the Lockerbie question. In this regard, I shall deal with the latest, not the oldest, of these developments. On 21 July the media announced that the United States and the United Kingdom were considering the possibility of accepting the two suspects for trial in a third country, which may be the Netherlands.

Libya contacted the President of the Security Council and most of its members, as well as the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, to welcome this development in the event that it became an official position. To prove and confirm its seriousness, Libya suggested to them that the Secretary-General should look into the matter once it became an official position and contact all the parties to seek to reach a practical and serious formula that would respond to the interests of all the parties and could gain their approval. Our intention was that if such a formula were submitted to the Security Council, its approval would be assured and its implementation would thereby be a foregone conclusion.

At the time, Libya expressed a number of fears and concerns to which it drew attention and warned against the Security Council approving any formula that did not address such fears and concerns in its enthusiasm of feeling that there was a positive development on the issue.

At that time — the last week of July — we drew attention to the fact that Libya was concerned that the other party might have taken its approach for certain short-term reasons: first, to circumvent the two Judgments of the International Court of Justice; secondly, to pre-empt the decision taken at the Ouagadougou summit; thirdly, to forestall a potential resolution at the Durban summit; fourthly, to continue the sanctions imposed on Libya; fifthly, to distance between the international community and support for Libya by misleading it into believing that the other party had already accepted the proposals of regional and international organizations; and sixthly, to take the whole question back to its starting point.

At that time, before the official position of the two countries was made public and as a test of the seriousness of the other party, Libya stressed the need for certain considerations. First, we requested a guarantee that the two suspects would not be handed over or moved to either the United States or the United Kingdom. Secondly, we asked for a guarantee of their legal, religious, social, personal and health rights throughout the various phases of the trial. Thirdly, we requested that the Libyan judicial authorities and the defence of the two suspects should handle all technical, legal questions relevant to the legal aspect of the trial. We were now talking about a legal and not a political matter. The legal and judicial authorities of the countries concerned had done so with regard to their side of the question.

Our intuition proved right and our suspicions were confirmed. On Monday, 24 August 1998, the United States and the United Kingdom addressed a joint letter to the Secretary-General to which they attached the text of a draft agreement between the Government of the Kingdom of the Netherlands and the Government of the United Kingdom, together with the text of a bill which the United Kingdom intended to enact as law to enable the Scottish Court to conduct the trial in the Netherlands.

On Tuesday, 25 August, the two countries submitted a draft resolution to the Security Council. On Wednesday, 26 August, the draft resolution was formally submitted to the Council. On Thursday, 27 August, as we expected, the Security Council approved the draft resolution, motivated by a feeling that it was a positive development, without pausing to discover the poison that was slipped surreptitiously into the honey.

The letter sent to the Secretary-General, together with its detailed and complicated legal attachments, was approved without giving even the members of the Security Council a chance to study them. Libya then requested the Council to postpone acting on the resolution because it and its attachments required consideration by the competent Libyan judicial authorities. These documents had not at that time reached Libya and had not even been translated into Arabic.

The adversary and the arbiter in the Council prevented the Council from responding to Libya's request. During the review session last March, the same adversary and the same arbiter prevented the Council from studying the Judgments of the International Court of Justice, officially referred to it by Libya, under the pretext that these Judgments needed to be studied by legal experts in their two countries. This stark contradiction in positions and criteria we leave to the judgement of the Assembly, and we have no doubt that it will reach the right conclusions.

Security Council resolution 1192 (1998), adopted on 27 August 1998, suggests that the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya has not implemented the requirements of Council resolutions, as in paragraph 1 it

> "Demands once again that the Libyan Government immediately comply with the above-mentioned resolutions."

This refers to resolutions 731 (1992), 748 (1992), 883 (1993). It also suggests that Libya has done nothing in that connection, whereas Libya has responded fully to all of these resolutions.

Paragraph 4 of resolution 1192 (1998) states that

> "the Libyan Government shall ensure that any evidence or witnesses in Libya are, upon the request of the court, promptly made available at the court in the Netherlands for the purpose of the trial".

To ask Libya to provide evidence and witnesses contradicts logic and law. It is not Libya that has accused the two suspects. It is the United States and the United Kingdom that claim to possess evidence which justifies their suspicions. They alone have the responsibility to provide the evidence and the witnesses for the prosecution in order to prove their case. This demand in itself proves that those two countries have no evidence to support the accusation of our two citizens. On what, then, is this suspicion based? It is a suspicion still in search of evidence and witnesses. The best quotation we can cite in this respect is the statement made by the freedom fighter and leader, President Nelson Mandela, last week in Washington: "I know of no system of jurisprudence anywhere in the world where the accused is required to produce witnesses for the prosecution."

On the whole, in the text to which I have been referring, Libya sees interference in the work and procedures of the court, a limitation on the rights of the accused to defend themselves, and an abrogation of Libya's legal rights guaranteed under international law and custom governing procedures and the provision of proof.

Security Council resolution 1192 (1998) referred to the joint letter dated 24 August 1998 from the Governments of the United Kingdom and of the United States, contained in document S/1998/795, to which is annexed the text of the intended agreement between the Governments of the Kingdom of the Netherlands and of the United Kingdom. In its article 16 (2), that agreement refers to the

> "transfer [of] the accused from the premises of the Scottish Court [in the Netherlands] to the territory of the United Kingdom ...,
>
> "(a) ... for the purpose of trial by jury in Scotland". (*S/1998/795, annex II*)

However, the initiative adopted by the Security Council, which in essence is a political initiative, is based on what was adopted by the regional and international organizations whose letters were cited in the preambular part of Security Council resolution 1192 (1998). Here we would like to refer in particular to the content of the joint letter from the Secretaries-General of the League of Arab States and of the Organization of African Unity, annexed to document S/1997/497. Any text that would make it possible to transfer the two suspects to any place other than the Netherlands, under any circumstances, runs counter to the regional initiatives accepted by the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya. That is only some of the poison in the honey: the world has heard that the United Kingdom and the United States have agreed to have a trial in the Netherlands. Now they talk about Scotland, the United Kingdom and the United States. We shall clarify this presently.

The letter then states, in paragraph 4, that, "If found guilty, the two accused will serve their sentence in the United Kingdom". Moreover, the intended agreement states in article 16 (2) (b) that the accused would be transferred to the United Kingdom "for the purpose of serving a custodial sentence imposed by the Scottish Court following the conviction of the accused".

That contradicts the initiative; I cannot believe that anyone understood the initiative to mean anything other than that the trial would take place in a third country. This provision runs counter to the general understanding of the initiative, that the purpose of the trial of the two suspects is to reveal the truth in the tragic incident of Pan Am flight 103, and not to exact revenge on two Libyan citizens who are merely suspected, without evidence. It is the understanding also that the ultimate venue of all the trial procedures would be in a third country: in the Netherlands, and not anywhere else. The agreement by the various parties to the holding of the trial in the Netherlands is a political solution that came about as a result of political action. The place where the sentence should be served, if, God forbid, they are convicted, should be the same place as the trial. This is part of the political solution.

They claim that Scottish law stipulates that sentences should be served in Scotland, because Scottish courts sit in Scotland. But this court will sit outside Scotland, so any sentence should also be carried out outside Scotland. The court is, exceptionally, sitting in another country, so the sentence must be served in the country where the trial takes place, not in Scotland.

Paragraph 8 of Security Council resolution 1192 (1998) reads in part that the Council

> "decides that the aforementioned measures shall be suspended immediately if the Secretary-General reports to the Council that the two accused have arrived in the Netherlands for the purpose of trial before the court described in paragraph 2 or" — and here pay attention to this new poison in the honey — "have appeared for trial before an appropriate court in the United Kingdom or the United States".

In a dispute that has lasted for more than seven years, this is the first time that the Security Council has adopted a resolution asserting that the trial can take place before a court in the United Kingdom or the United States. I have addressed a letter to the Secretary-General indicating that the proposal of the League of Arab States and the Organization of African Unity regarding a trial under Scottish law, before a Scottish court, at the International Court of Justice in The Hague defines an "appropriate court". But the resolution says

(*spoke in English*)

"an appropriate court in the United Kingdom or the United States", not an appropriate British or United States court.

(*spoke in Arabic*)

For the first time, the resolution refers to such a venue. There is no need for the addition of a reference to an "appropriate court in the United Kingdom or the United States" — unless the purpose is to transfer the two suspects to the Netherlands as a transit station before transferring them to one of the two countries mentioned in that paragraph. If that is the case, it can be qualified only as institutional piracy condoned by Security Council resolution. The world is unaware of this situation. I know that members are busy with their own concerns, but I remind them that I am citing the text of the new Security Council resolution.

Along with the rest of the international community, we have agreed to a trial before a Scottish court sitting in a third country, which could be the Netherlands. We have agreed to a Scottish court, to Scottish law and to Scottish judges, in the Netherlands. Those are the terms described in the decisions of the regional organizations. But what does that paragraph mean?

But Libya never subscribed to these new terms, and the regional organizations never agreed that a trial should take place in the United States or in the United Kingdom. To suggest that this is the "appropriate court" referred to in paragraph 16 of resolution 883 (1993) is to attempt to deceive the international community, and is yet another example of the poison in the honey. The Council was misled into accepting this because of the existence of a feeling that there was a change in the position of the two countries.

Another meaningless reference came in paragraph 8 on the relations between the Libyan Government and the French judicial authorities, relevant to the explosion of Union de Transports Aériens flight 772. This question has nothing to do with the subject of the initiative upon which resolution 1192 (1998) is based. Moreover, it is well established in the Security Council that Libya has done all that has been required of it by the French judge in this respect and that the French authorities have expressed their total satisfaction, and this was endorsed by the Security Council.

Libya believes that the optimal, pragmatic and prompt solution lies in conducting negotiations among all parties with a view to reaching an agreement on the practical procedures for the application of the option of trying the two suspects before a Scottish court in a neutral country — the Netherlands — as called for by the summit of the Non-Aligned Movement held in South Africa at the beginning of September 1998.

Should direct negotiations prove impossible due to the opposition of the United States and the United Kingdom, these negotiations can be conducted through the Secretary-General. The proposed agreement should determine all practical measures, the commitments of each party and the rights and guarantees to be accorded the two suspects and their defence team. It should also precisely state what all the parties are required to do so that the trial of the two suspects will be the final phase of the implementation of Security Council resolutions, not the first phase. This should lead to the lifting of the sanctions imposed on Libya and put an end to any

attempts to change positions or otherwise circumvent the situation under the pretext that Libya has not fully complied with Security Council resolutions — because Libya has fully done what it has been required to do.

Even the exchange of goods is governed by agreements and contracts that regulate and explain the responsibilities of various parties, suppliers and exporters. Goods are insured and reinsured against all risks. These are people, human beings we are talking about here. They are not going to the Netherlands for tourism; we're not going to bid them farewell, have a nice trip. Having said that, we wonder what is meant by electing to hold the trial in a military base used by the Americans in the Netherlands? Is the base that the Americans use as members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization the only place in the Netherlands where the trial can take place? What is this?

Following are some of the questions that the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya deems it necessary to resolve and reach an agreement on. First, there is a need to agree on listing, clarifying and determining, in advance, the witnesses needed — not only from Libya, but from all parties. The defence team should have the right to receive and peruse all evidence and cross-examine all witnesses. Secondly, there needs to be agreement on the place where the suspects would spend the time of their sentence in case of conviction, either in the Netherlands or in Libya. Thirdly, we need guarantees that the two suspects will not be extradited or transferred to either the United States or the United Kingdom for any reason whatsoever at any phase of the trial. Fourthly, there needs to be an agreement on the security, legal, personal, social, health and religious rights of the two suspects during the various phases of the trial.

We need to conclude an agreement between the Kingdom of the Netherlands and the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya specifying how the two suspects will be transferred to the Netherlands and guaranteeing their security and safety, during their transfer, stay and their return at the end of the trial. Such an agreement should be endorsed by the Security Council and implemented under the supervision of the Secretary-General of the United Nations.

In conclusion, I would like to reaffirm that the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya has accepted a trial of the two suspects before a Scottish court in accordance with Scottish law, presided over by Scottish judges, that would sit in the Netherlands, but we will not accept the setting of any conditions in relation to the implementation of that proposal. Libya is ready to take this exceptional road in order to reach a solution to the dispute that would satisfy the interests of all parties and in order to settle the outstanding legal issues through direct negotiations or through the Secretary-General.

Libya has not interfered in the agreements concluded by the other parties for the purposes of the trial. Also, it has not authorized anyone to decide on her behalf matters relating to her citizens, because this is its constitutional right and duty. The United Kingdom and the Netherlands can conclude an agreement; this has to do with the Netherlands court and because the Netherlands is the seat of the court, but as far as the Libyan citizens are concerned, we never authorized anyone to conclude any agreements on our behalf. We are responsible for our citizens, the suspects included. They have a team of lawyers to defend them. We do not interfere in other States' affairs, nor do we want anyone to interfere with our affairs either.

We would like to confirm our seriousness, our desire and our willingness to close the file of this case and other files as well, and open a new chapter in our relations with the countries concerned based on mutual respect and non-interference in internal affairs.

The Acting President: I now call on Her Excellency The Honourable Taufa Vakatale, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Education and Technology of the Republic of Fiji.

Ms. Vakatale (Fiji): My country and my delegation wish to take this opportunity to extend to Mr. Didier Opertti our warmest congratulations on his election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its fifty-third session. His election to the high office is a tribute to both him and his great country. My delegation also wishes to convey our deep gratitude and appreciation to the outgoing President at the fifty-second session of the Assembly, His Excellency Hennadiy Udovenko of Ukraine, who presided with boundless energy, vision and competence.

Change is a fact of life in our world. Change covers new paradigms, new systems, new technologies, new patterns in international relations and new initiatives aimed at lasting peace and international security.

Thus we welcomed the wind of change in the area of nuclear disarmament when we adopted the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) two

years ago. My country was the first to ratify the Treaty. But the more things change, the more they remain the same. Some months ago, India and Pakistan conducted nuclear tests. My delegation calls on India and Pakistan to reconsider their nuclear pretensions and to become parties to the CTBT. We call on all countries to become parties to this Treaty and to fully implement the provisions of the Treaty.

My delegation would like to see the CTBT improved to set a clear time-frame for the elimination of all nuclear weapons. As an imperative for meaningful change, my delegation urges all nuclear-weapon States to destroy all stockpiles and arsenals of nuclear weapons, and in so doing rid our world, once and for all, of nuclear weapons.

My delegation also calls for meaningful change regarding the elimination of all weapons of mass destruction. Let us rid our world of chemical weapons and biological weapons. We call on all nations to become parties to the landmines Convention so that we can all act collaboratively and meaningfully to rid our world of landmines as well.

Over the past three decades, the developing countries of the world have waged a desperate struggle for fundamental change in international economic relations in order to attain economic justice and facilitate economic development and sustained economic growth — thereby laying the foundation for eradicating the problems of high unemployment, hunger, disease and poverty, which ravage the least developed and developing countries. The establishment of the World Trade Organization was supposed to have laid the foundation for a new system of international trade relations which would contribute to the development of developing and least developed countries.

As a developing island State, we seek Members' support and indulgence in understanding the special needs and the vulnerability of small island States. They should be differentiated further, as a separate group of disadvantaged States. The work has already started on the determination of criteria for such differentiation based on a vulnerability index.

Among the members of the United Nations organizations, development is measured through the human development index, which takes into account the expansion of gross domestic product, real gross domestic product per capita, life expectancy of the population and other yardsticks. However, the hurricane that recently struck a number of islands in the Caribbean, the devastating tidal wave in northern Papua New Guinea and extreme drought conditions in many countries, including mine, demonstrate the vulnerability of small island States to natural disasters. We also sympathize with China and Bangladesh, which have suffered from extensive and prolonged flooding.

In Fiji, the Government right now is providing special food and water relief assistance to more than 54,000 households, or more than a quarter of Fiji's total population.

Because of the drought, we are expecting this year a 50 per cent reduction in our production of sugar, which is our main export, and there is no guarantee for an improvement for next year. Also, because of the drought, we do not have seeds of sufficient quality to allow for a quick recovery in the foreseeable future. Such is our vulnerability, and no part of the aforementioned index has any real relevance to our calamity. Things may have changed, with new names and new systems, but, alas, it is the same old story.

Mr. Filippi Balestra (San Marino), Vice-President, took the Chair.

I appeal to the United Nations development support system to consider special schemes of assistance covering natural disaster situations. There are already examples of such schemes in the Lomé Convention between the European Union member countries and the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) States.

The creation of the World Trade Organization was intended to lay the foundation for changes in international trade by ensuring an open, secure, equitable, transparent and predictable multilateral trading system. Yet developing countries continue to be paid paltry prices for their primary products; they continue to be denied access, under one pretext or another, to the markets of the developed countries; and even the little export trade we have is being taken away, as in the case of Saint Lucia and its banana exports to the European Union. Export trade is vital to economic development and sustained economic growth in developing countries. My delegation calls for remedial change in international trade — facilitating better prices for primary products, greater access to the markets of developed countries and the retention of special trade arrangements for the essential exports of developing countries.

We in the developing countries require substantial foreign investment capital flows to promote economic development, sustained economic growth and social and human development. Regrettably, there has been little change in the volume of international capital flows, the pace of such flows and the direction of such flows. Where flows have taken place, they have been directed to a handful of developing countries. My delegation calls for strategic change in the area of foreign investment through substantial, increased and continuous capital flows to developing countries.

We in the developing countries require new, environmentally sound technologies to facilitate and sustain economic development and social and human development. There is a dire need for us to participate in and benefit from appropriate, environmentally sound technologies. Yet despite our pleas for the cooperation and assistance of the industrialized countries for reciprocal change — by the transfer of appropriate technologies at an affordable price, by assisting us in institutional development and capacity-building to accommodate the transfer of such technologies and by assisting us with funding, education and training programmes to facilitate the transfer and stimulate increased cooperation at a business-to-business level — the situation has remained virtually the same.

Sustainable development is critical to small island developing States such as mine, for which the paramount challenge is to balance economic and social development with environmental protection. Six years have passed since the first Earth Summit in Rio, and the second summit has come and gone. Little progress has been made in securing new sources of financing for making the transition to sustainable development. My delegation calls for stimulating change on the issue of sustainable development through the prompt and full implementation of the commitments and recommendations of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development.

The reform of the United Nations to make it more relevant to today's world and more responsive to the needs, aspirations and hopes of the international community in all aspects of international relations has engaged our attention over the years, and more so last year with the presentation of the Secretary-General's reform programme. If the reform of the United Nations is to bring about purposeful change, then the Charter of the United Nations should be revised to remove the anachronisms contained in it and to make it more relevant to our world today and tomorrow. A geographical reconstruction of regional groups adapted to the geopolitical dimensions of today's world ought to be implemented. We submit that the current set of regional groups should be increased numerically and reconfigured. My delegation further submits that the membership of all United Nations organs and organizations should be governed by the principle of geographic rotation, so that each country can enjoy its right as a Member to serve on all United Nations bodies. The current system of rotation has resulted in some countries becoming de facto permanent members of the United Nations organs and organizations.

The Security Council is a classic example of things remaining the same. Membership on the Council, permanent and non-permanent, continues to be geographically inequitable. The system of rotation does not provide all Member countries the opportunity to serve on the Council, and the system is further aggravated by the number of regional groups and their geographical configuration. My delegation continues to call for a review of the membership and operations of the Council.

International peace and security has been one of the main pillars of the United Nations. This year marks 50 years of United Nations peacekeeping as an instrument for maintaining international peace and security. Yet we all are still beset by conflicts of one kind or another, and lasting peace and security in our world continues to elude us. My country is fully committed to the international peacekeeping missions of the United Nations.

In fact, this year also marks 20 years of participation by my country in United Nations peacekeeping. I should like to take this opportunity to pay homage to our brave sons who have made the supreme sacrifice in the service of international peace and security.

Because of the eminent contribution of international peacekeeping to permanent and lasting peace and security in our world, we call on all Member countries to settle their assessments for peacekeeping operations promptly and fully. My delegation would like to take this opportunity to express to the Secretary-General our sincere and deep appreciation for citing Fiji, among other countries, as consistently among the stalwart nations ready to contribute troops, police and observers and to take other steps to improve overall readiness.

My delegation deeply appreciates the meaningful change that has taken place in the scale of assessments of Member countries. My country welcomes the new assessment rates. But while such a beneficial measure has

taken place, the arrears in the annual contributions of some Member countries continue to plague our coffers and to place the finances of our organizations and our many and varied international programmes in jeopardy. My delegation calls on all Member countries which are in arrears in payment to pay those arrears promptly, fully and without conditions.

At a time when so many changes have taken place in our world in the areas of human development and human rights, the bleak future of the world's indigenous people has remained the same. My delegation calls on the international community to be more responsive to the need for a better future for our indigenous people. In the interest of meaningful change, my delegation calls for the speedy adoption of the draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the setting up in our Organization of a unit for indigenous peoples' affairs, the granting to the indigenous people of the right of self-determination, and the establishment of an international fund to promote and facilitate their survival, development and progress.

My delegation is aware that the most pervasive violation of human rights is violence against women, which cuts across all boundaries of culture, economic status and geography. In this connection, the Government of the Republic of the Fiji Islands has maintained the commitments entered into at Beijing through the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and met its obligations under the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

In promoting greater participation by women in economic and social development, a major initiative by the Government will be the launch by our Prime Minister, in the next few days, of its National Plan of Action. Addressed in the Plan will be areas such as the development and strengthening of women's enterprises, gender parity at decision-making levels, training, promotion and appointments, domestic violence, sexual abuse and child abuse, and review of laws which disadvantage women.

One area of meaningful change in our world has been the Convention on the Law of the Sea. It enjoys universal support and almost universal participation, and all States benefit from the stability and certainty that has been achieved by the Convention. The work being done with respect to the oceans requires the support of the international community if the achievements of the Convention are to be consolidated and its promise of benefits to the peoples of the world realized.

Sadly, the more things have changed in the Middle East, the more they seem to have remained the same. Peace in the Middle East remains as elusive and perpetually shifting as the Negev desert. The international community must play a stronger and more decisive role in getting the peace process on track, keeping it there and ensuring that it moves at a faster rate. We call on all the parties to the crisis to pursue positive and genuine negotiations to effect meaningful change through compromise and achieve a just and lasting peace in the Middle East.

My delegation calls for conciliatory change in Lebanon with the full implementation of resolution 425 (1978) in order that Lebanon may fully enjoy its territorial integrity, sovereignty and political independence.

Similarly, my delegation believes that a concessional change is necessary to find a solution to the situation in Kosovo. My delegation calls on the parties to the internecine conflict to enter into constructive dialogue on a political solution that should include a substantially greater degree of autonomy and meaningful self-administration in the territory.

The issue of Taiwan has remained unchanged. China and Taiwan contribute significantly to the development of the South Pacific region. My country is committed to a one-China policy and enjoys very good relations with both China and Taiwan. We therefore warmly welcome the renewed talks between China and Taiwan and hope that they will lead to profitable change on the Taiwan issue.

Likewise, on the Korean peninsula, we urge South Korea and North Korea to continue their dialogue to amicably resolve their common future.

The removal of tension and the resolution of remaining international disputes in East Asia are vitally important to the maintenance of peace and security in the entire Asia and Pacific region. For the Fiji Islands and other small island countries in the South Pacific, permanent peace in the wider Asia-Pacific region has a direct bearing on our economic future.

Given my country's commitment to global peace, the Government of the Republic of the Fiji Islands

strongly condemns international terrorism in all its violent forms. It is a scourge, and all States should treat it as such. My delegation urges universal condemnation of such indiscriminate acts of violence, and we pledge to cooperate with all other members of the General Assembly in preventing such acts and in bringing those responsible to justice.

We welcome the recent adoption at Rome of the statute of the International Criminal Court, and we express our gratitude to the Italian Government for hosting the conference at which this took place.

Last but not least, my delegation wishes to inform the Assembly that a new Constitution of Fiji was promulgated on 27 July 1998. Pursuant to the coming into force of the new Constitution, the name of our country has been changed to the Republic of the Fiji Islands. An innovative feature of the new Constitution is that it makes provision for the formation of a multi-party system of Government through representation in the Cabinet of all political parties that secure a certain number of seats in Parliament.

The new Constitution also makes provision for the appointment of a Human Rights Commission and a Constitutional Offices Commission. The Government of the Republic of the Fiji Islands considers the promulgation of the new Constitution as laying the foundation for meaningful change in our multiracial country. General elections under the new Constitution are due to be held next year.

Change is a paradox in international relations. If we are to fashion a new and better international community in which international democracy is to prevail and in which the development and progress of all nations is to be engendered, we, collectively and in collaboration, have to inculcate change in the many issues which my delegation has enumerated. We must make meaningful change in our world an international imperative.

The Acting President: The next speaker is His Excellency Mr. Boris Shikhmuradov, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Turkmenistan.

Mr. Shikhmuradov (Turkmenistan): First of all, permit me to congratulate Mr. Didier Opertti, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Uruguay, on his election to the post of President of the General Assembly. I would also like to address words of gratitude to Mr. Hennadiy Y. Udovenko for the dynamic and competent manner in which he carried out his duties as President of the previous session of the General Assembly.

We have very attentively studied the report of the Secretary-General on the work of the Organization and have a very positive opinion of it. The quiet revolution begun by the Secretary-General one year ago — the institutional reform of the United Nations — has become an irreversible process tied to the rapidly changing conditions of our new era. One of the major problems confronting the community of nations is how to better understand emerging socio-economic forces and the modalities of globalization, and how to channel them towards the fulfilment of our requirements.

Acting within the framework of the United Nations, Turkmenistan is expanding the scope of its responsibilities within the world community of nations. I have the honour to inform the Assembly that yesterday, here at United Nations Headquarters, Turkmenistan signed the Kyoto Protocol to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. Furthermore, today, during my meeting with the Secretary-General, I handed him the instrument of Turkmenistan's accession to the Convention on the Safety of United Nations and Associated Personnel, signed by the President of Turkmenistan. Although we know that accession by several countries more is still lacking for the Convention's entry into force, Turkmenistan by its example would like to call on other States Members of the Organization to join the Convention, adding their voices in its support — or rather in support of their citizens working for the United Nations.

The Secretary-General's proposal concerning real partnerships between the United Nations and multilateral regional organizations seems to be highly relevant, because regional organizations are especially effective in early warning and preventive diplomacy, as well as in finding optimal ways to carry out globalization.

The proposal on the establishment of a special unit to combat crime, terrorism, drug and weapons trafficking and money-laundering is very timely. A recent wave of terrorist acts around the world, including the bombings in Tanzania and Kenya and the killing of Iranian diplomats in Afghanistan, requires consolidation of efforts by the world community and decisive action. Turkmenistan resolutely fights against those negative phenomena and is prepared to contribute to the implementation of special United Nations programmes aimed at eradicating these evils.

Turkmenistan welcomes the strengthening of the framework mechanism for interaction among all organizations of the United Nations system. I would like to take this opportunity to express on behalf of the Government of Turkmenistan our gratitude to the missions of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and other United Nations agencies, the positive results of whose work in Turkmenistan cannot be overestimated. Turkmenistan also expresses its gratitude to the donor countries supporting those programmes in our country.

We are gravely concerned about the continuing armed conflict in Afghanistan because it has a negative impact on the stability of the region and on its economic development. Its impact also bears on Turkmenistan, which has one of the longest borders with Afghanistan, stretching for nearly 1,000 kilometres. Turkmenistan shares the opinion that there is no alternative to a peaceful, negotiated settlement in that country and that violence gives birth to violence and will only lead the process to a dead end. That is why we in Turkmenistan believe that the road to peace in that long-suffering nation lies through political negotiations among all parties to the conflict under the auspices of the United Nations. Turkmenistan fully supports the efforts of the United Nations, its Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, and his Special Envoy, Mr. Lakhdar Brahimi, and joint steps undertaken within the framework of the 6 + 2 mechanism. Turkmenistan's President, Mr. Saparmurat Niyazov, maintains constant contacts regarding this matter with the Secretary-General and with the leaders of neighbouring States. Turkmenistan will continue to cooperate closely with the United Nations in this regard. Interaction among Afghanistan's neighbouring countries, the United Nations, the Organization of the Islamic Conference and all the parties concerned should lead to the termination of one of the most protracted and violent conflicts of this century.

In view of the global changes that are taking place in the sphere of international relations, Turkmenistan believes that development of the Central Asian region objectively deserves the attention of the world. The States of that region have opened to the world a huge geopolitical and geoeconomic potential, enormous natural wealth, and geographical and transport opportunities. Turkmenistan is vigorously seeking alternative routes for delivery of its energy resources to international markets. In developing a strategy for the implementation of pipeline construction projects, we have proceeded and continue to proceed on the basis of various options. Pipeline infrastructure based on a variety of options will ensure an increased volume and greater diversification of energy deliveries, and will enable us to stabilize and guarantee their international distribution.

There is one more issue that I would like to dwell upon in this context. It concerns inter-State pipeline routes. The problem of international pipeline routes can well be compared to that of international sea straits, which was one of the most complex political and diplomatic challenges at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Today such straits ensure freedom of navigation, including for landlocked States. Their international legal recognition is called for by the economic and political interests of the world community in developing mutual relations. The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, adopted in 1982, reaffirmed the importance of maintaining freedom of navigation through straits and passages in archipelago waters and the need to do so. Freedom of navigation, which existed in the past as an international custom, was legally codified as one of the most important principles of international law.

In this context, of great interest are modern problems relating to the transportation of energy resources to international markets. It so happens that these enormous resources are located far away from the world markets. Usually it is landlocked nations that possess such resources, and the choice of delivery routes and the location of transnational pipelines has turned into a major problem of our times. The resolution of this problem lies at the centre of the geopolitical and geoeconomic interests of the States that own the resources, the transit States and the consumer countries.

In this respect, Turkmenistan promotes the initiative of security guarantees and unimpeded transit of energy resources along international pipelines. This initiative has already been discussed with a number of State leaders, as well as with the United Nations Secretary-General. We advocate the establishment of an international legal mechanism designed to protect the interests of the producers, transit countries and the consumers. It is necessary to fully preclude the possibility of pipelines being used as a means of political pressure and economic domination. The process of globalization in international economic relations calls for the elaboration of an international convention that will govern the regime of inter-State pipelines and guarantee their functioning. Turkmenistan regards this matter as one of the most

important challenges of the coming twenty-first century and is prepared to sponsor a document on this matter in the United Nations.

A change in the geopolitical situation has brought about a new correlation of interests in the Caspian Sea region, thus making it necessary to elaborate new approaches for the determination of the status of the Caspian Sea. The uncertainty that exists today with respect to this issue hampers rational use of the enormous potential of the Sea by the littoral States. A majority of the Caspian Sea States today favour the option of dividing the Caspian Sea into different sectors. Turkmenistan also supports this approach, just as it had previously supported the concept of condominium.

What is most important to us under either of the two approaches is that the interests of all littoral States should be fully taken into consideration and that cooperation in the Caspian Sea region should be built on the basis of mutual respect, equality and mutual benefit. The Caspian Sea should be a sea of accord, and its wealth should be a common heritage of all littoral States, with each of them having a right to a corresponding national share of the sea. Turkmenistan believes that the search for a new legal status of the Caspian Sea, which would require all littoral States to look for reasonable compromises and display readiness to have an appropriate perception of new realities, should be ensured by means of monitoring by the United Nations.

Today the process of establishing a new international legal status of the Caspian Sea confronts a number of difficulties fraught with very negative consequences for regional stability. Under these conditions we consider that United Nations involvement would be highly appropriate.

We are happy to see that today there is a growing tendency towards restraint with respect to the attempts aimed at associating extremism and other negative phenomena with the world of Islam. The Muslim world is multifaceted and diverse. It faces a great range of universal and global problems of development. In this context, there emerges an objective need for mutual understanding and dialogue among various religious trends, a need for restraint and tolerance. The President of the United States, the President of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Prime Minister of Turkey and the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of Germany and Russia have expressed very wise and politically promising ideas and statements during the current session. In this respect, we find of great interest the idea voiced by the President of Iran, Mr. Khatami, on declaring the year 2001 the year of dialogue between civilizations. The point is that the resolution of today's global challenges is inconceivable without a meaningful dialogue, an exchange of opinions and a search for ways to resolve the most pressing problems.

It is already three years since Turkmenistan began pursuing its policy as a State of permanent neutrality. Turkmenistan's neutrality is not a shell that protects it from dangers and tribulations of the outside world. On the contrary, it is a position of strength that allows us to actively influence the situation in our region and the world as a whole and to develop effective international cooperation. We seek to maintain equal and equitable relations with all nations, and our national interests are pursued through economic openness and political impartiality. Proceeding from this position, Turkmenistan attaches great importance to the United Nations role as a unique international institution in which all countries of our planet have equal access to international debate and the resolution of problems that concern them.

Turkmenistan believes that on the eve of the twenty-first century the United Nations should acquire additional powers and responsibilities, and strengthen its current ones, by becoming a major factor in establishing a climate of mutual respect and trust both in separate regions and the world as a whole.

In conclusion, I would like to recall a proposal made by the Secretary-General regarding the holding of the General Assembly session in the year 2000 in the form of the Millennium Assembly. That Assembly would give all the Member States of the United Nations a unique opportunity to take a look into the future, to ponder how they perceive the United Nations of today and to speculate on what kind of United Nations they will support in the next century.

The Acting President: The next speaker is Mr. Mustafa Osman Ismaiel, Minister for External Relations of the Sudan, to whom I give the floor.

Mr. Ismaiel (Sudan) (*interpretation from Arabic*): Allow me at the outset to congratulate Mr. Opertti on his election to the presidency of the General Assembly at this session. We are confident that his vast experience and capabilities will lead this session to success. I would like to assure him of the full cooperation of my delegation. Allow me also to express our gratitude to his predecessor, the former Foreign Minister of Ukraine, for his commendable efforts and to express similar congratulations to the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi

Annan, and his able assistants for their efforts to ensure an improved performance by the Organization, to bolster its status and to achieve its lofty objectives.

There are many questions in my country, in our Arab and African region, and in the rest of the world. There is a war raging between our neighbours on the eastern and southern borders. All of these questions need to be debated.

The considerable improvement in the economic situation in the Sudan is reflected in the latest International Monetary Fund (IMF) reports, which indicate an increase in the growth rate and a reduction in the inflation rate. We expect the Sudan to become an oil-exporting State in the next few months. This is an issue which we are very happy to brief you on.

There is also the constitutional evolution and political openness in the Sudan, culminating in the approval by the Sudanese people in a referendum of a new constitution earlier this year. This will enhance the institutions of civil governance and the peaceful transfer of power based on a system of political pluralism. These developments are important to political stability in Africa's largest country, the Sudan, a land of vast untapped resources.

I also wish to talk about the humanitarian situation in the Sudan and the improvements in that situation. Sudan appreciates the efforts of the international community and expresses its full commitment to cooperate in the facilitation of these efforts. This is a matter which deserves further elaboration.

There are also the peace efforts in southern Sudan and the positive response of the Sudanese Government to the calls for a ceasefire by the international community, including the Security Council, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and the European Union. This ceasefire was rejected by the rebel movement, resulting in the continuation of war and more suffering for the citizens. This also is a matter which requires further elaboration.

All these questions require more details, but I will leave that to other committees and forums, as I shall concentrate today on one single issue: the American aggression committed against my country on 20 August 1998. This American act, if not properly addressed, could undermine all the achievements made by our people through years of struggle and suffering.

It would be appropriate to recall the events which began on 7 August. On that day the explosions took place in Nairobi and Dar-es-Salaam. That same evening the Sudan condemned those heinous terrorist acts. We conveyed our condolences to the Presidents and the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of the United States, Kenya and the United Republic of Tanzania. I also made telephone calls to my Kenyan and Tanzanian colleagues expressing Sudan's fullest readiness to cooperate to the maximum possible extent in the efforts to search for, apprehend and punish the culprits.

The American Administration requested fly-over permission for their military aircraft in order to evacuate the wounded and the dead from Nairobi and Dar-es-Salaam, and their request was granted. That was followed by another request for open fly-over permission for their military aircraft, to which we responded promptly and in good faith, as it was, in our view, a humanitarian request which deserved a response. Subsequently, contacts in this regard between the Sudanese and American security authorities were begun. We welcomed these contacts and gave assurances of our full cooperation.

But, all of a sudden, within minutes and without warning, the Sudanese people were shocked on the evening of Thursday, 20 August, by a grave act of terrorism, as heinous and cowardly as those of Dar-es-Salaam and Nairobi. The "Al-Shifa" pharmaceutical plant, which only a few hours before that event was producing life-saving medicines for children, women and the elderly in the Sudan and which was a model of the economic development of my country, was completely destroyed.

Some of the innocent Sudanese citizens, employees of the factory, lost their lives under the rubble, while others lost their sight, or some of their limbs, or were left swimming in blood. Families of the victims and the rest of the employees were suddenly bereft of the sources of their livelihood.

A few minutes later, we watched the message of the American President on television, where he stated that the United States armed forces had launched air strikes against the Sudan and Afghanistan. He said that they had destroyed a plant in the Sudan linked to Osama Bin Laden which produced chemical weapons.

This is the American perspective, which I have conveyed to you clearly. What then is the Sudanese perspective?

I would like to state clearly and confidently that the factory produced medicine — and nothing but medicine. The plant belonged to the private sector. It was owned by a Sudanese businessman, and it had no link whatsoever with Osama Bin Laden. The factory was financed by the PTA Bank of the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA). It was one of the largest of its kind in the Middle East and Africa.

In his speech at the inaugural meeting of this session of the Assembly, President Clinton spoke about the tolerance and greatness of Islam. We appreciate what he said and would like to add that Islam calls for mutual respect between civilizations, cultures and religions. Islam calls for dialogue — indeed, all the revealed religions call for dialogue — and all of these religions abhor and renounce violence and injustice, because injustice begets hatred.

All faiths call for justice. The principal rule of law stipulates that the accused is innocent until proven guilty. However, here we are faced with a situation in which the Sudan was accused by the United States, the Sudan was condemned by the United States and the Sudan was punished by the United States. Thus, the United States has acted as the adversary, the jury and the judge — the opponent and the arbiter. The whole world rejected the American aggression and its justification.

Allow me to mention here some of those who supported our position in the Sudan: the Arab League, the Organization of African Unity (OAU), the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), the Group of 77 and China, and large sectors of the American community, including former President Jimmy Carter, former Attorney-General Ramsey Clark, a number of Congressmen and the American mass media. Our position was also supported by high-ranking officials of Western countries, including presidents and foreign ministers, as well as by the British, Jordanian and American engineers who took part in the construction and operation of the factory and who continued their technical association with it until it was destroyed. A number of legal experts and lawyers from Western countries, as well as international trade unions and non-governmental organizations also voiced their support.

In spite of this, the United States continues to oppose the dispatch of a fact-finding mission by the Security Council. The American officials claim that they analysed a sample of the soil near the factory and found that it contained chemical precursors used in the production of VX — a nerve gas.

If they are so sure of what they found, we wonder why they object to the dispatch of a fact-finding mission by the Security Council so that the Council can be the judge. The factory has been destroyed, true; but the soil is still there and the remnants and the rubble of the factory are there. The fact-finding mission can easily collect soil samples and examine the machines, look into the documents and establish the facts about the output and ownership of the factory. This is the sole demand of the Sudan now.

Last week the Group of Arab States presented a draft resolution to the Security Council. The draft does not seek to condemn the United States for its violation of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of a Member State. It only requests the dispatch of a fact-finding mission to verify the allegations that were the basis of the decision by the United States to launch a strike against a medicine factory in the Sudan.

It is the responsibility, indeed the obligation of the Security Council to do so. This is only a procedural measure to ascertain the facts — a procedure which the Council has always followed in similar situations. Therefore the Sudan and the entire international community call on the Security Council to send an urgent fact-finding mission to the Sudan so that the international community can verify the allegations upon which the United States based its decision to strike the medicine factory.

The Sudan recognizes that sending a fact-finding mission is a legitimate request by a developing country that holds dear the principles of international legitimacy and believes strongly that the fight against terrorism, which we condemn in all its forms, whether committed by individuals, groups or States, must be based on the principles and channels of international legitimacy and cooperation and the renunciation of force as a means for hegemony and domination.

We in the Sudan recognize that the United States is a super-Power, and we do not seek to involve ourselves in a confrontation or altercation with that super-Power. On the contrary, we are keen on establishing correct relations with the United States on the basis of mutual respect, common interest and constructive criticism. We are ready to engage in a dialogue with the United States and to cooperate with it on all issues of common concern.

The people of the Sudan respect the American people and are eager to maintain good relations with them. It is incumbent upon the two Governments to work on reflecting this desire and to strengthen these historic relations.

We have paid tribute to the countries that provided humanitarian assistance to those affected by the war in southern Sudan, including the United States. However, we are perplexed by the provocative statement recently made by the spokesman of the American Administration when he announced the donation of $25,000 to the victims of floods in the Sudan. The statement claimed that despite its differences with the Government of the Sudan, the American Administration is concerned about the welfare of the Sudanese people.

The American Administration launched 17 cruise missiles to destroy the pharmaceutical factory. Each of those missiles costs $1 million, for a total of $17 million to destroy our factory. Now the United States announces its contribution of $25,000 to the Sudanese victims of the floods, while the damage caused by the floods is estimated to exceed $40 million. Had the American Administration genuinely been concerned with the welfare and well-being of the Sudanese people, it would not have attacked and destroyed one of our main economic entities, which produced over 50 per cent of the essential and life-saving medicines which the Sudan requires.

Therefore, on behalf of the Sudanese people, we say to the American Administration, that we want our factory back, the factory we built with our toil and sweat and which cost us millions of dollars. We need the medicine of which our people were deprived as a result of the destruction of the factory, particularly in this time of the flooding crisis which caused rampant diseases and epidemics, according to United Nations reports.

Allow me now to briefly reflect on some of the conflicts that are taking place in our area, in view of their direct impact on peace and security in the region.

I start with our eastern borders, where the conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea will undoubtedly lead to a deterioration of the situation in the region. The Sudan, which still hosts hundreds of thousands of refugees from the two neighbouring countries, is strongly affected by this conflict. Hence, from this rostrum we urge the two neighbouring countries to exercise self-restraint and to resort to peaceful means to settle their differences. We also hope that the efforts of the OAU will succeed in reaching a peaceful settlement to this dispute.

On the other hand, we are following with great concern the developments in our southern neighbour, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which is suffering from external interference in its internal affairs. We hope that the efforts of the African countries will be successful in assisting the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo in maintaining peace and stability on its territory.

As regards the peace process in the Middle East, hopes for a final settlement have evaporated as a result of the Israeli intransigence, which placed hurdles on the road to peace.

The Sudan welcomes the General Assembly resolution upgrading the Palestinian participation and supports the steps taken by the Palestinian leadership to declare the state of Palestine with Jerusalem as its capital. The Sudan also denounces the Israeli attempts to Judaize Jerusalem and change its demographic composition and legal status.

Furthermore, the Sudan supports the rights of Syria and Lebanon to regain their occupied territories in the Golan and in southern Lebanon, and it calls upon the international community and the Security Council to exert pressure on Israel to implement the relevant Security Council resolutions and to heed the call for a just peace in order for the region to enjoy peace and security.

The embargo imposed on Iraq has lasted for too long, and the suffering of the Iraqi people has deepened. Thousands of women, children and elderly people have lost their lives because of the lack of food and medicine, and the world is wondering when the blockade will come to an end. The latest impasse between the United Nations Special Commission and Iraq could result in catastrophic consequences in the area. This should prompt the Security Council to intervene by carrying out a comprehensive review of Iraqi compliance with Security Council resolutions with a view to lifting the embargo. The Sudan commends the efforts of the Secretary-General and expresses the hope that these efforts will lead to a breakthrough in the current impasse.

The Sudan also wishes to stress the importance of resolving the issue of the detainees and the missing Kuwaitis as a humanitarian question, and it calls for redoubling regional and international efforts to settle this problem so that the women and children who have waited so long can be reunited with their husbands and parents. This would also eliminate the causes of tension and restore solidarity and reconciliation between Arab nations and States.

As regards the issue of Lockerbie, we are very much concerned with the embargo imposed on the sisterly Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, our neighbour. The damaging consequences of this embargo have spilled over from Libya to the neighbouring countries, including the Sudan, which has hundreds of thousands of citizens living in the Jamahiriya. It is a cause for sadness that scores of those citizens have lost their lives while trying to cross the vast desert between the two countries as a result of the air blockade imposed on the Jamahiriya. While welcoming the recent positive developments in this issue, we stress the need to provide the guarantees requested by the Jamahiriya, as referred to by the President of Burkina Faso, the current Chairman of the OAU, in his statement before the Security Council last week.

Conflicts in Africa have caused numerous difficulties, including the problems of refugees and displaced persons. As a result, Africa has become host to the largest number of refugees in the world. Their number is estimated at more than 8 million, and they live in the harshest conditions.

In its efforts to put an end to the suffering of refugees and to find durable solutions to this problem, the OAU decided to convene the first ministerial meeting of the Committee on Refugees and Disappeared Persons in Khartoum in December 1998 at the level of foreign minister. We in the Sudan look forward to the international community's effective participation in and support for this conference in order to ensure its success. The countries of the continent are hopeful that the conference will produce results which would assist in dealing with this long-standing problem.

I should like to conclude with a verse from the Holy Koran:

> "God commands justice, the doing of good, and liberality to kith and kin. He forbids all shameful deeds, and injustice and rebellion. He instructs you that ye may receive admonition." (*The Holy Koran, XVI:90*)

The meeting rose at 2.05 p.m.